



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

SA
ND
II



SALVIA
RICHMOND





6000789580



BODLEIAN LIBRARY
OXFORD

AND



SON,
L.

100-100000
100-100000
100-100000
100-100000

SALVIA RICHMOND.

A Novel.

"And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?"—GENESIS xxv. 31, 32.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1878.

(All rights reserved.)

251. e. 583

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. VISITATIO INFIRMORUM 	1
II. THE SPIDER AND THE FLY 	20
III. INTRODUCES OUR HEROINE 	53
IV. A RURAL INQUEST 	84
V. THE ROSE IN THE PRAYER-BOOK 	131
VI. CUSTOMARY SUITS OF SOLEMN BLACK	147
VII. RUPERT IVORY 	174
VIII. WITHOUT AN INTRODUCTION 	213
IX. COW-DRIVING 	237
X. WITH AN INTRODUCTION 	249

SALVIA RICHMOND.



CHAPTER I.

VISITATIO INFIRMORUM.

TIME, waster of all things, bringer of all things, draw up the curtain, and set thy puppets playing!

What wilt thou make us see in the forefront of the comedy or tragedy about to ensue? Wilt thou give us tears or laughter, fair sky or thunder-cloud? Set Chance, thy scene-painter, to daub, and he shall presently dash us in crimson effect and silver radiations; let him sprinkle vine leaves and violets; let him blend flesh-coloured yew berries, and the last torch inverted at the

door of the sepulchre; let him dip his brush in a rainbow and shower his canvas with gold dust! But that shall be hereafter, if it shall be at all. Let him for the present husband the wonders of his pallet and dissemble the power of his maul-stick! Paint us in, O artist Chance, as prelude, a mere neutral grey and umber background of city sunrise!

* * * * *

Dawn is creeping over Islington, "pleasant Islington," as the old ballad chooses to call it. A shiver, as of the far-off sea, is crisping the few railed-in suburban shrubs. Something like dew glitters on the knob of the doctor's door. Clouds, with fringes of light and central cores of darkness, rack heavily away over the long, low roofs and eternally recurrent stacks of hideous chimneys. Coming suddenly to the corner of a mews, the country and its meadows breathe out reminders from the straw and hay. There glides a beam and augury of morning along the labyrinths of

dawn-stricken house-fronts. Sleep is over and done, and the toil of the day begins. Who comes here, harbinger of sunrise? No less a personage than the milkman, in his white canvas jacket and low-crowned beaver hat. How cheerily he rattles his jingling cart through the empty, echoing thoroughfares of the somnolent city! How jauntily he turns his head to lavish a Parthian smile to that earliest of awaking Hebes in a top attic! Alas! her mistress, Juno, wakeful in her turn, has seen it all with a wrathful glare between the lower window-blind.

Who come next to herald in the dawn? Alas! the curses of the poet, the earwigs of the *littérateur*, the terrible sons of Northern Italy, they who carry torment in their square boxes of sound. Noiseless as yet, the wretches prowl onwards to their beats. Will there never arise a Herod of the organ-grinders? Let us turn to less awful themes. Here, for instance, is the cab-rank, slowly filling with fresh arrivals. Here, at each end of the street, clear in morning air, stands a police-

man. One calls out a northward good morrow to his brother guardian of the night, and the brother shouts down a southward reply.

Now the waggon traffic will begin—the tottering Juggernaut wains of cauliflowers, the moving mountains of cabbage, which go to the Mahomet of Covent Garden. The lingering, crawling hay carts, with lessons in the geography of Herts or Buckinghamshire, for him who is awake to read them, on the tarpaulins of their patient horses' backs. Shall we omit, conspicuous at this hour, those strange-looking vehicles, sinister and unsavoury, barrels mounted upon wheels, with ear-like driving perches at their side, who call from area to area, collecting the remnants of defrauded city Lazaruses? What are these that drive the chariots of Mephitis? Women? They should be women by their bonnets, abortions of chaos and night. Can the Lady Blanche, in samite and diamonds, mystic, wonderful at the birthday drawing-room, and Joan jolting on the pig-wash tub, be

sisters of a common womanhood? I am glad the last hideous creature has turned the corner, though the auroral air is yet mindful of her chariot wheels. Let her pass.

Songsters of the city, begin, sweeten my memory with your voices; strike up, on roofs, in roads, on sooty trees in squares—strike up full orchestra, and give the morning welcome! Ye small, brown choristers, who sing the mighty city's morning anthem; ye London sparrows, dusty and flippant, careless and impudent as the Arabs of the street, whom ye resemble; chirp out your natural chorus, for labour is awake! The jostling, shambling, good-humoured tide of artizans begins. Builders, masons, delvers, joiners, on they go. The pale scholar, paid at half their wage, watches them pass enviously, then turns to recommence with daylight some heart-breaking index, some soul-wearing catalogue of editions. Long after scholar and craftsman, respectability begins to think about getting up. The huge stuccoed mansions, where Plutus snores at ease, and where

the silver spoon is emblem of Lucina, condescend to open one of their lazy eyes, typified by a housemaid, who throws up the drawing-room window-sash. Presently, a hundred mats are dusted against a hundred area railings. Presently, a hundred kneeling maids whiten a century of door-steps. Presently, a brisk fire of postmen's knocks begins at the further end of the street, reminding one of a practice day at a rifle-butt. A boy essays to cull a harvest of pewter pots from a long vista of area railings. That earliest of birds, the tax-collector, is astir, sorting his bundles of notices, opening his bulky pocket-book; he who, unlike his proverbial prototype, seeks to find certain shy human worms before it is possible to advance the social fiction of their having already crawled out. Then the first organ tunes up, and the first butcher-boy hurls his steed frantically along, like another Phaethon, over the sounding pavements; down come the shutters of the shops; home goes the portable stall for tea and coffee; out rush the news-boys, casting down areas a

printed and compendious statement of how the civilized universe feels itself on this particular sunrise, at the low charge of one penny ; the pet dogs are kicked out, yelping, for a run ; and the grey cats creep down home along the gutter-pipes ; in fine, the great city is awake, and little shabby genteel Seymour Street, not to be behind the fashion, craves leave to follow the great city's example, and wakens in its turn.

In the resuscitation of Seymour Street was involved the rising up of Ophelia Dredge, a reputable householder within its precincts, who, by letting lodgings, managed to clear her rates and rent, when times were fairly prosperous. Mrs. Dredge was one of those widows whose husbands are not as yet found in any churchyard ; Ophelia was, in short, like her sponsor of Denmark, a deserted woman. There all resemblance must end. The days of the landlady of Seymour Street were one bitter and brisk struggle for existence. Her waking life was one continual war of repression with the general servant

for the time being in residence. These aids were changeful in their generations, as the autumnal woods. Some were tempersome, all were dirty, many were unendurable.

As for Ophelia Dredge, her not numerous cronies over the way and up the street often speculated on the reason of her romantic name. We may, therefore, explain that one Cackett, a theatrical carpenter, found a help-mate to his mind on the stage of a transpositional theatre. The tastes of her parents stamped this name on their infant, who was suckled in the side-scenes, and weaned under green vistas of pasteboard. Yet, as young Ophelia cut her second teeth, she refused to step in parental grooves, and elected to begin life as assistant in a bun-shop. Thence she drifted to the counter of a fancy stationer. Finally, she settled down into domestic service. As lady's maid in a family of distinction—though why or how distinguished we know not—she encountered the perfidious Josiah Dredge, future master of her girlish destiny.

An under-butler was Dredge, of uncertain eye and bushy whiskers, to whom one Sunday evening, in the solitude of a Camberwell omnibus, Ophelia rashly confided the fact that a small legacy from Cackett, deceased, stood to her credit in a certain savings bank. After this disclosure, Dredge redoubled his attentions. They both gave warning, the day was named, Ophelia stood at the altar, and the lodging-house in Seymour Street was taken. Part of the furniture was bought with the late carpenter's savings, the rest was trusted.

Ophelia saw to the lodgers, Dredge, resplendent in white waistcoat, intermittently attended evening parties. But with little to do, Dredge rapidly deteriorated; Ophelia had a spirit of her own, and an interval of internecine domestic war succeeded. One morning Dredge was missing, and the few portable articles of any value in the house were missing likewise. Ophelia remained to face a chorus of indignant creditors.

But in the hour of trial the deserted wife

rose superior to calamity. She persuaded the tradesmen to give her time, and paid them off little by little. She acquiesced stoically in the disappearance of her husband, and still managed to keep on the lodging-house. She found it quite as easy to pay her way without the sottish partner, who had claimed to control her earnings without himself increasing them.

A little woman was Ophelia Dredge, with an eye like a hawk, and cheeks puckered like a winter apple. The lines about her lips showed some decision of character; her nose was flat and short and her forehead high and bumpy. On either side her face she wore exactly three tight curls, arranged in parallel lines above her ears. She usually had on a grey stuff gown, short, tight, and serviceable. Her only ornament was a long, thick, hair chain; which was much frayed and roughened by constant wear.

So Ophelia Dredge, having arisen with Seymour Street, Islington, proceeded to prepare her lodger's breakfast; and, having

carried it upstairs, applied her knuckles smartly to the panel of that gentleman's door.

Obeying a faint and rather querulous permission to enter, Mrs. Dredge came into the presence of an invalid. He was in the amphibious state, if we may be pardoned the expression; that is to say, his lower extremities were in bed; yet down to the waist he was visible, sitting up wrapt in a slovenly blue flannel dressing-gown. On a cane-bottomed chair by his bedside lay his watch, a match-box, and a bunch of keys. A guttered end of tallow candle and a half-ebbed brandy bottle occupied the dressing-table. One or two dilapidated surtouts, and a nearly pileless travelling-rug were thrown upon the coverlet to eke out the warmth. Two more properties completed the scene—a stone jar, containing mineral water of some kind, and one of those curious orange serpentine coils of tinder attached to a flint, a chain, and a steel plate, at the end of which the tremulous fingers of the sick man were endeavouring to procure a

light for a cigarette, which he had just manufactured out of a sheet of a tiny volume of silver paper.

Mr. Julian Leyland, as he sat up in bed, looked yellow, ragged, and unkempt. Much did he seem to need the good offices both of a hairbrush and a razor. It was difficult to make any off-hand estimate of his age. He seemed a young man; he seemed an old one. But the brilliant eyes and sallow, sunken cheeks supplied only too plain evidence of recent and serious illness. When on his feet, Ophelia's lodger must have been above the middle height. He might have passed, had he been washed and well, for not wholly a bad-looking fellow. His features were regular and finely cut. His general aspect was that of an eagle, rather impaired by captivity, or out of condition at the moulting season. But it was the pinched, weary, pain-worn expression of the face which prevented the features being wholly pleasing, despite their almost sculpturesque outlines. A soft, nicely modulated voice and a jerky, restless manner,

rather birdlike in its abruptness, complete our sketch of the invalid.

“That eternal piano next door has commenced as usual with cock-crow!” began Leyland, in a reproachful whine, as the landlady appeared. “And to mend matters, that servant of yours has been beating time on every kind of brazen and earthenware utensil which has come within her reach. By Heaven! why does that girl make the staircase creak so at each of her ascents? I do not bring the whole place down when I go up. She surely could set the next room straight without dancing an absolute quadrille with the furniture!”

“She has been catching up the front parlour this morning,” said the landlady.

“What a fearful domestic process!” sighed Julian.

“You are nervous, sir,” replied Mrs. Dredge, “and the least thing jars you. But Martha Bulstrode is an elephant, as I am free to own to you; although for six pounds a year—and I cannot go beyond it—an

elephant must be expected, and nothing better."

"I shiver all over with apprehension," explained the invalid, "whenever she enters my room; her elbows catch and overturn everything; what escapes her elbows, her knees or toes crash against. She is a terrible girl. My nerves are quite gone, Mrs. Dredge."

"I fear that they are, sir," agreed the landlady, simply; "added to which, you rested very poorly. I heard you tossing about, and rolling like a vessel in distress, through half this mortal night."

"I shall be all right—presently," replied the lodger, with an effort; "but if I have another night like the last, I shall ask you to get a nurse in. I feel as if I cannot go to sleep without some one to watch me. I fear, in fact, to close my eyes. I might faint, or do worse, with no help at hand. I need some one to watch me like a lynx. I need another will in the room besides my own. I have neither will nor wishing power left in me—not a rag. I sit five minutes wishing to

reach out my arm for the newspaper. A sort of charm is on me, and I cannot move a finger. I am a miserable wreck, and, in short, my nervous system is utterly prostrated. Pshaw! We shall not improve matters, Mrs. Dredge, by moaning about it. I dare say in a day or two I shall improve; and now for breakfast."

The landlady placed upon the parlour table a small round tray, containing a squat brown teapot, somewhat damaged in the spout, a pat of butter stamped with a sailing swan, two gritty slices of toast, and a poached egg, rather faded in appearance.

"New laid," said Mrs. Dredge, hopefully, as she set down the last item before him—"at least, it is fresher than many, and with a pinch of pepper, it will be fully equal to a country one."

"One moment, Mrs. Dredge," said her lodger as she turned to depart. "I don't seem to make much progress here, and Islington is, after all, just a little noisy, so it has come into my head to try a country

change, fresh air and new diet, eh, Mrs. Dredge?"

"Which you are never fit to go, sir," put in the landlady, volubly.

"One never knows," said the invalid, feebly, "till one tries; I cannot but return, if the experiment fails."

"Feet foremost," said Mrs. Dredge to herself.

"About the tradesmen," resumed Leyland, with some constraint. "You might mention at the baker's, and casually observe at the buttermilk's, that this was only a flying visit. I do not feel equal to adding up their books before departure."

Mrs. Dredge nodded, and deprecated such an arithmetical effort under the circumstances.

"As to your own rent," coughed the invalid, "perhaps you will not object to allow that to run—till my return."

"On a stretcher," murmured Mrs. Dredge to herself.

"I expect some remittances," faltered the

invalid, feeling casually in the pocket of his dressing-gown, in case the remittance alluded to might have arrived there without his knowledge; "in fact, I am now awaiting a friend to bring me some—ahem—advice."

Ophelia Dredge looked just a shadow disappointed at this anti-climax, but begged that Mr. Leyland would not mention rent.

"In short," said the lodger, "my expected friend is at this present moment—ahem—ringing."

"I hear him," answered Ophelia, grimly, but still she did not stir.

"I think that must be Archer," pursued Leyland, slightly raising his voice.

"Humph!" said the landlady, scratching her chin dubiously.

"Had you not better go and see?" he suggested, mildly, as a second interlude on the bell-wire was impatiently jerked.

Ophelia Dredge moved to the parlour window; and, dusting a patch of the glass with her apron, took an oblique, leisurely survey of the candidate for admission. Re-

turning thence to the centre of the room, she reported, with a contemptuous head-toss, "It is only that Archer; bother him!"

"He comes by appointment," said Julian Leyland, feebly.

On this, Ophelia Dredge drew herself up to her full height—not a very lofty one—and gave her lodger a piece of her mind. "Mr. Leyland, sir," she began, in a somewhat epistolatory form; "it is three months, come next Wednesday at noon, since we rode with your departed lady before us to the cemetery; and well you know it, that she, poor thing! could never abear the sound or the shadow of that hard-faced Archer about her premises. Did this vagabonding Archer ever dare to show his idle looks inside No. 63 while she was brisk and hearty? No; but contrary you know it, as the girl below, now under warning, can certify. And you must go against her when she has been under-ground not long enough to rust your mourning hat-band; and such are widowers, all creation over! And now it is hand with Archer,

and glove with Archer; and none so welcome as Archer; and much you have prospered with our precious Archer! Get along with you!" And here Mrs. Dredge paused for breath, and placed her arms akimbo.

"My good woman," expostulated her lodger, tremulously, "you mean well, but your zeal outruns your discretion. In the first place, I am too weak to discuss at present these painful details; in the next place, whatever view be taken of Archer, it is hardly courteous to keep him outside much longer."

So Ophelia went moodily away to admit Gilbert Archer, and Julian got out of bed and hastily completed his toilet.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

THE entrance of Mr. Gilbert Archer upon our scenic boards is an event of sufficient magnitude to demand the commencement of a fresh chapter.

Gilbert Archer was a young man upon a large scale, with handsome, regular, but somewhat swollen features. His eyes were light blue and large, not particularly sincere or very truthful eyes, yet certainly pleasant ones. His complexion was raw, reddish, puffy, and suggested late hours, with too free a use of stimulants. His hair was flaxen, nearly as light as a child's, with a crisp ripple and gloss upon it. In front, however, it had become thin, and over his forehead he

was nearly bald. He wore a moustache in the drooping, military fashion, and under his nether lip a rakish imperial. Speaking generally, there was a want of finish and restraint about the man. He diffused a conflicting atmosphere of brandy, musk, and stale tobacco smoke. The velvet collar to his coat, the massive gold albert chain across his waistcoat, the diamond ring on by no means an over clean hand—all jarred and sorted ill with the obvious seediness of his general attire. A nameless flavour of public billiard-rooms and theatrical bars hung about the fellow; a strange sauntering sense of having just come out of questionable company; an insidious air of chronically waiting for nobody at corners, and hulking about aimlessly in lobbies. Gilbert Archer never could look as if he had gone properly and reasonably to bed. Gilbert Archer never could look as if he had been properly washed and brushed in the morning.

Ophelia Dredge, having sufficiently compromised her dignity by opening the street

door to Archer, was going to usher him no further. So he burst in by himself. Carelessly placing his hat on the floor, he deposited a showy-looking cane and tassel transversely across the remains of the breakfast, so that its appendage just hung over into the milk-jug.

"Thunder and vinegar in our landlady's aspect this morning," began Archer, slightly out of breath. "What does this portend, my Trojan?"

The ten years' siege must have been considerably abridged, could Julian, as he then sat, have been accepted as a fair sample of that doughty nation.

"Rent in arrear," replied the other, evasively; "do not notice her."

"And how goes it with our invalid?" was the next question.

"So, so," said Leyland, carelessly; "tight in the chest and light in the head. But never mind my health. I am glad you have dropped in. I want to discuss this reversion sale with you."

"My time is yours," said Archer, crossing his legs. "Go on!"

"The first question is," observed Leyland, drawing up a chair, "Where am I? How far have I gone with this money-lender? Can I recede? Ought I to recede?"

"You are still," returned Archer, "perfectly free to sell the reversion of the Redburn property or to keep it undisposed of. Unless matters beyond my knowledge have passed, since I was here, between yourself and this usurer."

"Nothing has transpired," said Leyland, with a head-shake. "You have been at my elbow through every twist and turn of these negotiations. Your friendship has nobly sustained and wisely advised me throughout. How can I ever repay you?"

Archer begged that he might hear no more on that subject.

"Disinterested friendship is so rare now-a-days," persisted the other; "and what claim had I upon you? None!"

"I have had nothing to offer except sympathy," said Archer, making light of it.

"You remember," Julian went on, "how you introduced yourself to me at a public eating-house. You heard my name mentioned by accident in the room, and you accosted me, saying you were interested in any one of my family."

"I believe I did," said Archer, evasively.

"And from that day we have been fast friends," recounted Julian. "Now, you could have had no object to serve in claiming my acquaintance. No one ever introduced himself to me before."

Archer fidgeted about upon his chair rather uneasily during this retrospect; and merely murmured that Julian was good enough greatly to overrate his small services.

"Then I will spare you further thanks," replied Julian. "Like all generous natures, yours becomes uneasy at expressed gratitude. And now I claim your patience to help me to arrive at some final decision regarding this loan. Suppose, by way of preface, I once more run over the leading features and events of our past intercourse with the firm.

It will clear my head, and be business-like, though, I fear, I may prove tedious. Do you mind?"

Archer protested that he had come for that very purpose; they could not be too methodical; the prospect of a large sum of money was never wearisome to discuss.

"Well, then," continued the other, "I use your kind indulgence and begin. Act first, scene first. The introduction! Now this ensued as follows: One morning about a month ago, when I felt myself a trifle on the mend, you sallied out, kindly enough, to buy me something succulent and tempting to my poor sick appetite. A newspaper scrap enfolded my luncheon, and, when the latter was consumed, with the aimless indolence of an invalid, I fell to perusing the former. It contained merely advertisements—one from a money-lender; an ordinary affair enough; I had read a hundred such before, and they had never stirred me to answer them. Now the idea of getting some cash flashed upon me like an inspiration."

"And you wrote," supplied Archer, with an incipient yawn.

"The name was Ivory," resumed the invalid, "Rupert Ivory and Co., of Grayfriars, in the City. I asked them to come here, as I was a sick man. I requested you to be present as my backer and bottle-holder. I knew no more than a child of such filibusters. The firm arrived in the person of one Hake. He was the company——"

"Deuced bad company, too," said Archer, drumming his fingers.

"And Ivory's confidential clerk," resumed Julian.

"Deputy horse-leech," from the other.

"We began that day with a small loan, Archer; and I gave a bill of sale on these chairs and tables. It was a nuisance having to call in Mrs. Dredge to certify that I was pledging my own property, and not her furniture. It was distrustful of Hake to insist on such an appeal."

"Neither," threw in Archer, with a twinkle in his eye, "was our landlady's rejoinder under

the circumstances at all creditable to her taste or her temper. It might have been the fact that she would have scorned your furniture at a gift, but there was no need to proclaim this scorn in the presence of a stranger."

"How soon that five-pound note melted away!" pursued Julian, sadly. It was scrambled for by the doctor and the landlady. Once more with empty pockets I summoned Hake. He came, but did not see his way—his own words—to any further accommodation——"

"Until," interrupted Archer, with a hoarse laugh, "happening to catch with the corner of his wary eye that picture of Redburn Priory above the mantelpiece, he observed that the deer in the foreground were very crisp and natural; and you replied, with pardonable pride—for the fellow was off-hand and bumptious—that Redburn was your uncle's seat, and that Mr. Hake's head might be cooler if he would remove his hat."

"That changed his manner," continued Julian, "and excited his curiosity. So the

whole story came out by degrees. But you have heard this table of descent *ad nauseam* on twenty previous occasions——”

“Let us have it once more!” exclaimed Archer, cheerfully. “I never can remember pedigrees.”

“Once upon a time,” commenced Julian, his pale face flushing as he spoke, “there was a baronet. This was Sir Richard Leyland, of Redburn, and, having at the time of his death, three sons, he made a will; and by it entailed his land upon them successively, and upon the heirs male of their respective bodies.”

“A most respectable and conservative will,” said Archer, with a yawn of portentous dimensions.

“You know the old ballad?” Julian went on, with a melancholy smile——

“ ‘There was a ewe had three lambs,
And one of them was black——’

Well, in this case there were two black sheep out of three sons; a larger percentage of nigritude, Sidney, Thomas, and Martin.

.

Sidney, eldest and present owner, a rake and a spendthrift; Thomas, the second, a pious, hard-working clergyman, my late father; Martin, the third, a boosy, harum-scarum son of Mars. Both Thomas and Martin sleep with Sir Richard in the family vault. Sidney, sole survivor, reigns at Redburn. I cannot honestly acclaim, 'Long live the king!'"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Archer, "that would be self-denial with a vengeance!"

Julian went on, "Sir Sidney, you must know, was a mighty scamp and prodigal in his younger days; and, after about ten years' possession of the property, he had so involved himself on all sides, that, but for my father's timely assistance, he must have let the Priory and lived abroad."

"And gratefully," sneered Archer, "does this baronet now repay the son of the brother who then saved his credit and character!"

"My father," resumed Julian, "joined Sir Sidney in cutting off the entail, which my grandfather's will had created, and my father allowed twenty thousand pounds to be raised

upon the property so released, to pay Sir Sidney's bond and simple contract creditors. But, after this generous concession, Thomas Leyland felt he had done enough; so he set down his foot and made his bargain. The estate, as re-settled, gave Sir Sidney a life interest only. The fee and the freehold under the new arrangement were limited to Thomas Leyland; that is to say, my father, whether he outlived his elder brother or predeceased him, became absolute owner of the reversion of Redburn; and this reversion he could give, leave, or sell away to any one he pleased."

"But I cannot understand," said Archer, interrupting him, "how Sir Sidney came ever to consent to such an arrangement. He might have had a son, and the effect of this resettlement would be effectually to disinherit his own issue."

"My worthy uncle," explained Julian, with a sneer, "has never looked beyond the day after to-morrow. His theory of existence has been to squeeze the greatest amount of physical enjoyment out of the immediate

present. He had then insolvency and Boulogne before his eyes. An insolvent sensualist is a thief with his hands tied. An epicurean on twopence halfpenny at Boulogne might just as well be in his grave. For twenty thousand down, his unborn children were entirely and resignedly shelved. Yet it is only fair to say that Sir Sidney was at the time neither married nor likely to be. In fact, he had been, till cash ran out, paying great attentions to the then celebrated actress, Mrs. Ogleton."

"Your father acted like a long-sighted man," said Archer, nodding approval. "And yet his spendthrift brother outlived him, and won the life-race. Luck always does favour a scapegrace, except in my own instance. There is a candid admission for you!"

"My father knew perfectly well," continued Julian, sighing, "that he would die first. He never wanted the estate for himself. A country clergyman of the simplest tastes and the most diffident manners, it would have bored him greatly to have succeeded to such

a position. No, my dear fellow, he wanted the estate for my most unworthy self. I repaid him, I fear, very undutifully ; I became entangled in a marriage engagement. The affair was in every respect a foolish one, the new connection on no matrimonial ground desirable, and I myself at best only half-hearted in the matter. Partly to please my father, who was in despair, and more because I had already wearied of my intended, I tried to back out of my promise. Useless ! Poor Rose's people held me like a vice to my engagement. We were married, and lived much as other married folks do—in mutual toleration. Rose hated my father, and kept us separate. I only saw him thrice after my marriage. I deserved to be disinherited, but he handed on to me, unrestricted, his interest in Redburn. I stand at present in his shoes. I can sell the Priory, if I please, to a pie-man, or leave it to a chimney-sweep."

"Did Martin, who followed the drum, leave issue ?"

"One son, Richard, a poor devil, who

writes for his bread ; I know no further harm of him. Sir Sidney allows us both to starve, with most impartial similarity of neglect."

"And here," exclaimed Archer, heightening his voice, and pointing round with the sealing-wax, "you are, sitting in this dog-hole of desolation, with the very chair beneath you pledged, and the very table before you pawned. I never heard a harder case. You ought to demand an allowance from your uncle either by letter or by forcing him to see you. The last course would be vastly the best. No one ever heard of an heir to a large estate being in such a plight as you are. I think that you told me you had written to Sir Sidney once ; write again !"

"I did," said Julian, colouring, "and—and my uncle insulted my wife, and used such expressions about my marriage in his reply, that, as a gentleman, while Rose lived, I could not again address him."

"But now," suggested Archer, quietly, "the case is altered. Try him once more. I know as little about landed property as a

marine store dealer ; yet I am not prepared to deny that eight or ten thousand pounds in hand, mind, *in hand*, and hard cash, are not, perhaps, better than a park and preserves in the vague bush of the hereafter. And yet, hang me, if I know how to advise you. Suppose the gout went to Sir Sidney's stomach a week after you sold the reversion. How supremely annoying ! ”

“ But my uncle has no gout, that I know of.”

“ Don't be provoking ! ” exclaimed the other ; “ something might fly to his head or settle on his chest.”

“ Nothing of the kind,” sighed Julian. “ In Sir Sidney's case the good old adage will be verified, ‘ Without heart or brain, a man will live till a hundred.’ ”

“ Phew ! ” cried Archer, with a sniff. “ I yield ; I am vanquished. Let us close with the money-lender.”

“ Where was I ? ” asked Julian, drawing a long breath. “ I mean, at what point did I digress from our interview with Hake into the Leyland family history ? ”

"We left Hake," reminded Archer, "admiring the fallow deer."

"Hake returned three or four times," Julian went on. "He went to Doctors' Commons, and I showed him the Leyland settlement. At last he made a definite bid—three thousand pounds."

"Which you," Archer rejoined, "as a man of spirit, very properly rejected."

"At your suggestion, I did," continued Julian. "We marched in from the bedroom, whither we had retired to consult, and demanded ten thousand pounds boldly. I shall never forget Hake's face. He declared that we were insane. He left in a perfect frenzy of annoyance. I felt persuaded that we had spoilt everything by our exorbitant demands. All my hopes of obtaining this loan were extinguished."

"On the contrary," laughed Archer, throwing back his head, "nothing was extinguished except poor Hake and his employer's confidence in his sagacity, inasmuch as by next morning's post, the great man, Rupert

Ivory, wrote right royally that Hake had ceased to be his clerk, having been cashiered at half an hour's notice for gross incompetence; that henceforward the head of the firm would transact our affair in person."

"Can you account for Hake's dismissal?" asked the invalid.

"I can give a shrewd guess thereat," rejoined the other. "Hake set us down as a couple of simpletons; and no doubt told his principal he was going to get him this reversionary plum for an old song; and vaunted himself and his astuteness hugely in Ivory's office on this expectation. But when Ivory had to be informed that we, the supposed boobies, had taken heart to ask something like the marketable value, the usurer leaped to the conclusion that either Hake had played him false, or that we had outwitted the clerk. In either case, Hake was no longer a deputy to be trusted."

"And so you think that Ivory will now give me what I ask?" inquired Julian.

"I am positive," insisted Archer, "from

the tone of his last letter, that he will agree to *nearly* what you ask without much difficulty."

"I believe he will," said Julian, despondently; "and so the matter hangs."

Archer observed that he should not allow such golden fruit to hang long without plucking it.

"And to pluck it, you advise me," said Julian, languidly trifling with his tea-spoon. "I may now confess to you, that I too formed a resolve during the night, which curiously jumps with a suggestion which you have just thrown out. Rest would not come, and I kept turning my domestic complications over and over, in those strange labyrinths which entangle our half-wakeful fancy."

"Indigestion," commented Archer, sucking the head of his walking-cane.

"With this result," continued Julian, his voice growing husky as he proceeded. "A resolve is made, sudden and new, yet somewhat meritorious. My fortunes are desperate, and I am—our past conversation shows it—

on the brink of a bargain with a money-lender."

"A blood-sucker," supplied the listener, nodding pleasantly. "Go on, old boy."

"Before signing and sealing," Leyland went on, "I mean to try my final card in the beggar-my-neighbour game which I am playing for existence."

"Good!"

"In spite of my extreme reluctance to take this step, which, you, who know me, can form some idea of, I shall run down to Blankshire by parliamentary train, and try the effect of an unexpected and personal appeal to the feelings—if he has any—of my uncle."

"Sir Sidney Leyland, Baronet. Good again!"

"I detail my present difficulties, announce the death of my poor wife. While Rose lived, all idea of reconciliation was chimerical; the baronet's most cruel, most insulting letter showed that, as the husband of a tradesman's daughter, I never claimed admission within his worship's park-palings. As the widower

of a tradesman's daughter, perhaps he will slay a leanish calf of congratulation on my arrival."

"Old Lucifer!" said Archer, moodily; "it's a toss up, a mere chance of the tide, how he will take your coming."

"Now I have lost my health and—my wife, Sir Sidney may condescend to receive me."

"Bah!" cried Archer, shrugging his shoulders; "this tone of submission will never advance your cause an inch at Redburn. Assume an air of importance, man. Dictate your own ultimatum. You hold the key of the position, unless I have greatly misunderstood your previous explanations of your prospects."

"Well, in a measure I do hold this key."

"And fear to turn it? Pluck up a spirit, comrade of my vicissitudes! Tell Sir Sidney out in black and white, your terms—payment of present debts and a regular allowance for the future; some apology for his letter in the past. Failing which, you, with much

regret, but still of cogent necessity, mean to sell Redburn Priory, with the fallow deer and fallow pastures, oaks, lawns, lodges, farms, fields, and fences, with the appurtenances thereof, over his head to the Hebrews."

"That should move him," meditated Julian, with his head on one side.

"And will," insisted Archer, adding an oath. "Only consider, my dear fellow, how shamefully he has served you during the past. Your available income has barely equalled the salary of this baronet's French cook. Your poor wife has worn clothes in which Lady Leyland's waiting-maid would never have condescended to appear. By God! let them see that your turn is come now."

"And yet," argued Julian, irresolutely, "it goes against me. I should prefer some compromise; and I feel convinced that my uncle will listen to none. He has always oppressed me, and I shall die, as I have lived, in a garret. If I do sell this reversion, on his head be the guilt of such a sale; for, I

must confess, that it is a strong measure to hand over the cradle of one's ancestors to a usurer!"

"Cant!" cried Archer. "Excuse me, my dear fellow, but this is utter cant. Let us avoid melodrama. What have your ancestors ever done for you? The last of the line, this worthy uncle, has thought it right to keep his heir-presumptive without a crust of bread." Julian shook his head, as Archer paused for breath. "Look at this dismal den," said Archer, indicating with a sweep of his arm the apartments of Mrs. Dredge, who was fortunately out of earshot. "Here is Sir Sidney Leyland, with pleasure-horses, powdered footmen, rich wines, and all the paraphernalia of affluence. Here are you, among antimacassars, shell ornaments, and fly-traps. Have a spirit, friend, and bring Sir Epicure Mammon to his senses."

"We shall see," said Julian, dubiously; "I know that I lack decision; yet, when driven into a corner, as now, I am resolute enough. But, like other undecided characters,

I have a bad knack of pledging myself on impulse to a line of conduct which my previous and calmer deliberation rejects. Hence, I wish to avoid any personal interview with Rupert Ivory, until I have played my last card, namely, the application *in formâ pauperis* at Redburn Priory gate. If I see Ivory, he may talk me into pledging myself irrevocably. I won't see him until I have been to Blankshire."

"Are you resolute," inquired Archer, with a spice of sarcasm, "upon that point?"

"Resolute?" echoed the other, querulously, "How in my present state can I be resolute upon any point? I may seize a pen, ten minutes after the front door closes behind you, and appoint Ivory here to-morrow. Children and invalids change like the wind. 'Tis their privilege."

"Come," said Archer, kindly, taking Julian's hand and looking earnestly into his sick friend's countenance, "I do not half like you rushing off on this wild impulse to Redburn. You are not strong enough yet,

believe me, for this Blankshire jaunt. Consider—a journey cold and fatiguing; at its termination a still colder reception. Your health is delicate, your funds are insufficient, your cough is troublesome. Let me suggest a middle course. Appeal to your uncle through the post-office, and nurse yourself here till his reply.”

“Useless!” exclaimed Julian, shuddering; “utterly useless! You do not know Sir Sidney. My only chance is to *shame* him into assisting me, to surprise him into reluctant and recalcitrant benevolence. I shall put on my very worst clothes. He will not relish the arrival of a man in a threadbare coat, who claims to be his worship’s nephew; that will make him wince before his powdered footmen and distinguished guests. Pity will not move him, but fear of losing caste may.”

“If you read your uncle right,” rejoined the other, scratching his head, “I foresee your journey will be wasted. Your mere coming will disgrace him so much that he

will be in no melting mood for concession. Let him alone. You may as well appeal to the Giant's Causeway. The screw of the money-lender is better than the tender mercies of such an uncle. Sell his acres over his selfish head to Rupert Ivory. That is my last word."

"It is a good old family," mused Julian, *sotto voce*.

"With a bad new head," put in the other, hastily.

"Ten thousand pounds are a great temptation," soliloquized the invalid, writing the sum on the blotting pad, and holding it out to try its written effect.

"And you hesitate?" exclaimed Archer, incredulously. "With all these potential golden guineas awaiting birth at a single stroke of your pen?"

"The old name!" murmured Julian, with downcast eyes.

"The old fiddle-stick!" retorted Archer, furiously. "Man alive, if I only stood for an hour in your [shoe-leather, do you suppose

that I should submit to be shipped off to the nether side of this insignificant planet?"

"Forgive my egotism, old fellow," said Julian, extending his hand. "I am ill, and therefore I am inconsiderate. How could you let me prose on, all this time, about my own miseries with such an announcement weighing on your own mind? Is it, then, settled definitely that you emigrate?"

"It was arranged beyond recall yesterday," replied Archer. "Heigho! Only yesterday. Confound my luck! I sail in three weeks."

"I chatter all my affairs to you like a magpie," Julian went on; "but you are such a close file, and hardly ever allow me a glimpse of your own. Now, my dear friend, I don't wish to obtrude myself into an arrangement which is clearly one of the utmost delicacy and the strictest confidence, but may I take it that you leave England for the Antipodes clearly against your own will?"

"Emphatically against my will," said Archer, pulling a wry face.

"Hang me, then, if I can understand your

pliancy in going!" exclaimed Julian at a loss.

"When you come in life," said Archer, with a darkening of his face, "to a blind alley of mystery, a dead barrier of complication, take my word for it, old boy, there is always a woman on the other side of the wall."

"Oh, there's a lady in the case!" smiled Julian, rounding his mouth for an inaudible whistle. "Well, no daughter of Eve for her pleasure should send me to the kangaroos."

"Women have sent men in plenty before now altogether out of the reach of all terrestrial zoology," returned Archer, with an ugly movement of his hand across his neckcloth.

"I wonder if I know her?" hazarded Julian. The conversation had taken a most uncomfortable drift, and he made the first remark that came to hand to divert it.

Archer started; and scanned his querist narrowly, and with some suspicion. "Are you likely to know her?" protested he, parrying one question with another.

"The last man in the world," agreed

Julian, frankly. "I made the inquiry in quite an aimless way."

"Oh, did you?" said Archer, appeased. "Well, I don't mind telling you so far, that a married lady's reputation is compromised in this business; and, therefore, I am silent as the grave. I am voted, they tell me, a dangerous kind of fellow to her peace of mind." Archer made this announcement with a shrug, and then complacently arranged his left moustache in the blurred pier-glass above the mantelpiece.

"Very much so," agreed his friend, for it seemed necessary to express some complimentary concurrence.

"Her family, therefore, offer me strong pecuniary inducement to emigrate," pursued Archer, airily; "the lady on her knees entreats me to do so. I kiss her hand, and say, 'Madam, behold the humblest of your slaves. To hear is to obey. I will sail, as my cruel lady-love commands me. But, by Jupiter! I am poor as Job. You are sending me a long way for your own convenience;

therefore, why should I, out of any morbid delicacy, refuse the acceptable subsidies which your family so thoughtfully presses into my departing palm ?' "

" Even if I went to save the girl's credit," mused Julian, moodily, " I don't think I should accept their money."

" That is a matter of sentiment," reasoned Archer, with a furtive glance of thinly disguised contempt. " The family council of my charmer choose and elect to pay. They are rolling in wealth. I let them do so. More than this, they are kind enough to arrange every detail of my voyage. They allow me, such is their zeal, no volition in the matter. Bless you, I am the last person to be consulted. They have booked my berth in the *Norfolk*, A 1, sixteen years, seven hundred tons register. She sails for Melbourne on the 25th of this month. I suppose they will put me on board. I am quite passive in the matter."

" You absurd fellow !"

" Come and see me delivered over the vessel's side like a bale of dry and somewhat

explosive goods. Come and see the last of me. Blue-peter flutters at the mast-head. Beneath, is a nautical pandemonium of wailing babies, knots of frowsy emigrants, Jack-tars, chests, rigging, bulwarks, oaths, and 'Rule Britannia,' complete the dismal picture."

"Are you paid in a lump before sailing?" was Julian's next inquiry.

"The Committee of the Society for the Emigration of Black Sheep is far too crafty to do any such simple thing," said Archer, with a leer. "I am franked out to Melbourne; and for the future I shall receive a stated sum quarterly, which I am to draw in person at an attorney's office in that city."

"In case any one should draw it for you, and you should either never sail or return prematurely," commented his friend.

"Their motives to the very echo," said Archer, nodding.

"I shall miss you grievously," Julian went on. "But it is some comfort that you do not leave England yet. I mean only to be absent a few days on this Blankshire trip; and then,

Hesperides. But naming dragons suggests—I mean no unpoliteness—our landlady. One can't control one's mental associations. Remember, I am notably in her bad books. Will she admit me to look over your letters?"

"I will leave express injunctions with her to that effect," said Julian, loftily.

"Return soon," said Archer, heartily; "for, bear in mind, the longer you race about Blankshire, the shorter margin of time will be left me for seeing you before the *Norfolk* sails me away into my perpetual banishment."

"I shall return under a week," promised Julian. "I feel my spirits rising now at the prospect of this trip. I think that my mind is made up at last. A sort of feeling—a presentiment—has come upon me, that this journey to Redburn will turn out to my great and lasting advantage."

"Then go, and prosper!" cried Archer, clapping him on the shoulder.

So the two friends shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCES OUR HEROINE.

“I REFUSE to be hemmed in any longer between these stifling parsonage walls! I must rush out upon the down, yet grey up behind our house in morning vapour. If I can only clamber up in time, it will be well worth the run to watch from that vantage-ground the gradual tender streaks of glory throbbing through those sullen belts of orient cloud. The sun will come up just behind that fir plantation. See, the blue-black canopy overhead grows rosier every instant. I can hurry on my things in ten minutes, as I need not dress in expectation of any company up there. Shall I take my pocket edition of Ossian, or will the heroes of the mist and

their white-armed loves be this morning a little monotonous? Shall I carry a parasol? On the whole, I think I will. I wonder how the lovely daughters of Morven managed to avoid freckles? I have half a mind to play truant from the vicarial breakfast-table, unless, like a wolf in my French story-book, I am driven down again to the village by hunger."

So I declaimed to my own restless self on one morning in early May. I had risen fevered and wakeful from my little couch about day-break. Audience, none was near to hear this rhapsody. My small solitary bed-chamber was perched up in one of the vicarage gables, like the aerial coop of a restless dove. How pleasantly the fresh air rushed in as I unhasped my window! What fragrance of wet leaves! what rich scents of meadows newly awakened, came to me, as I peered out through my tiny pigeon-hole! What a calm, holy scene it was! and yet my heart burnt and was hot within me. Why should sick fancies and yearnings unattain-

able intrude themselves, when all around me told of the sacred morning peace ?

Yet, so it was, as I, Salvia Richmond, stood at my lattice deep in contemplation. My days had flown on hitherto in uneventful seclusion. My father's vicarage lay hidden away in a fold of the long interminable downs. Redburn was his parish named ; Blankshire was our county. In clear windy weather one could just catch the shining line of the Channel from our highest points in the downs. When I sighted the sea, I knew that rain was coming ; hence I was regarded as somewhat of a weather prophet in our little household.

But this particular morning was far too warm and steamy to promise any sea view. I felt sorry for that ; somehow, I knew that a sight of the infinite ocean would have done me good. Down here everything was so pent-in and limited. I knew the prospect from my window so wearily well by heart. I dare say the scene was pretty enough to waken upon once or twice ; but I had learnt

every outline by rote, and I was so tired of it all. For the hundredth time, I glanced down in some contempt upon the red tiles and mossy thatch of our hamlet. I saw the newly kindled fires in cottage homes breathing up in filmy blue threads, which entangled themselves in the few gaunt Lombardy poplars. The sleek cows were lowing gently out in the pastures, and stretched themselves with a luxurious sense of healthful rest before they bent to their morning meal. I was near enough even to make out the *greener* crushed patches, which their night's repose had stamped here and there about the dewy meadows. I heard the comfortable, insect-like chirr of the starlings, with whose legions my poplars seemed literally alive. Then came the jolting and the groaning of a heavy oblong miller's cart, which toiled up the winding road against the opposite hill. I could count the back-folded tops of the great dusty sacks ; but the bank-hedges of the lane, which grated its boughs against them, were so deep, that horses, wheels, and half their load were engulfed from my view.

So I, Salvia Richmond, saw all these sweet sights of rural morning, and (shall I confess it?) at that instant I hated them all. I have caught at and written down the first word that came to express a feeling stronger than weariness; but this term "hatred" wholly fails to render an emotion infinitely more subtle, more complicated. Weariness, impatience, a sense of void, a burning earnestness of hope; blend all these together, and you will, I think, to some extent realize my then somewhat heterogeneous state of mind.

For, indeed, the familiar scene under my window represented, as it were on a map, the whole extent, with its bounding limits, of an existence surely narrow enough. Over and across this little pinfold of my fate, the infinite changes of the morning atmosphere went on. Keenly I felt the wonder of the fleeting lights, the rare loveliness of the almost transparent shadows; yet the joy of these things affected me with a sharp reaction of pain, and I declare that, there and then, my whole soul rose up in revolt and disgust at

my unprofitable destiny; my whole soul seemed, like a shivering and panting bird, to sigh to be free and be gone, to yearn to take unto herself the wings of a dove, that she might flee away over yonder rim of mountain and be at rest; that, like a weary sea-tern, seeking light unattainable, she might dash herself dead against those burning bars on the gates of sunrise.

Thus I, the vicar's daughter, then somewhat wildly prologized. I had been a child solitary and sisterless. I had become in process of years a dreamy, discontented woman. I presume that I might so designate myself, although I was only just eighteen; and I further conclude that I was tolerably pretty. At least, my few friends and monitors were assiduous in declaring, for my special behoof, that good looks were soon gone and that beauty was only skin-deep. From their frequent recurrence to such platitudes in my presence, I was driven to conclude that had I been a plain girl I should have heard less upon the text that comeliness is unenduring.

I heartily agreed with my elders so far as this, that it mattered very little how one looked before an audience so restricted as the good villagers of Redburn. Nay more, I felt inclined to rejoin, in my girlish petulance, that the aspect of the day, no less than the looks of the maidens, signified equally and woe-fully little in this benighted spot. Weather foul or fair, daughters coarse or comely, affect the indwellers of this apathetic hamlet with one even, stolid indifference. Grey gaps of down, steeped in shimmering haze, are all very well; but, until I can find some appreciative person with whom to compare my impressions, is it worth while climbing up to these heights at all? Let their cliffs rather wrap themselves in folds of hail and stormy cloud; warm in the valley, I can scorn the wild turmoil above me; I can pin myself up to the chin in a blanket, and I need then no confidant to hear how cozy and warm I feel. So, having vented my petulance upon my dear old landscape, let me resume common sense. Our nearest friends enjoy the melan-

choly prerogative of bearing the brunt of our worst humours. With this meagre apology to a slighted prospect, let me endeavour once more to be rational, and proceed.

To commence. Let me take stock of how days are running with me here in Redburn. The present is at my feet like this village rivulet. The future is yonder; one slow cloud, sad and leaden, beating up the valley from the channel. A solitary blot upon the expanse of even azure, it creeps on. A belated drift, wholly out of place, it floats up overhead. It seems to me driven against its will by some blind purpose, which it must obey, but yet cannot understand. Must this cloud dissolve in summer rain? or is it harbinger of broken thunder? or will it pass away and give no sign?—since the protesting ether may absorb this cloud in her great, clear, even bosom of stainless light. God and Fate will answer for the sweet cloud in their good season. God and Fate will reply for that small speck of humanity called Salvia Richmond, in their proper time.

But, pending some definite summons from the unseen, am I not placed here in this isolated valley as a life wholly without drift or promise? There comes upon me at times that hopeless feeling of being overlooked and forgotten in the vast scheme of creation. My soul is not commended, is not condemned, is simply *passed over*. A terrible fancy this, worse in many respects than a vivid sense of reprobation. The soul could rise by its own innate antagonistic energy against any sentence of censure felt to be unjust; but now she stagnates, wholly crushed by an awful sense of oblivion—an oblivion almost like obliteration.

Let me return once more to actualities. Whom have I in this illimitable earth to care for? Who would go through fire and water for my dear sake? The flood must be only instep-deep, the blaze mere Christmas snap-dragon, to tempt forth either foot or hand in my service *at present*. But must it ever be with me, O creeping cloud, that some other revelation will be unfolded? In all the graves

of dead sweet women, folded in their long hair, and dim in their white robes, did not among these many a heart of dust thrill once to a touch which made exceedingly divine the brief day of their incarnation?—the memory of whose hours the soul shall bear about herself through eons and beyond eternities; this neither the grave-stain nor the night of the sepulchre shall ever wash away!

Alas! I am incorrigible this morning; digression succeeds periphrasis. Beginning with a practical survey of my situation, I have ended in a rhapsody on dust and winding-sheets. No one to care about, indeed! Is my good old father to be laid thus rashly aside in the category of nobody? Where should I be without him, I should like to know? Who am I, to fret for occupation and interests, with his long woollen stockings to mend? Are not his shirt and other buttons sufficient anxieties in themselves to engross one mind of average feminine capacity? Not to mention the quill pens, which require

mending at the rate of some five to a sermon; not to dilate upon the cutting and stitching of the weekly clerical newspaper; but——

Well, that “but,” at which my last paragraph broke off into an abrupt chasm, may and must mean something. Concede me this, my reader, and, since I cannot exactly see my way to the completion of that sentence, be merciful, and let it remain in its present precipitous form. Well, I turn to another point. I wish it to be clearly understood that when the weather is dull and grey, I am not on these unsatisfactory terms either with myself or with my home pursuits. In short, my mental complacency bears an inverse proportion to the height of the mercury in the bulb of the barometer. Am I peculiar in this, that a fine day should always make me restless? For example, in a good steady November drizzle, I draw my feet up to the fire and bully the coals about. I can read poetry, or build air-castles, whichever I please. I can institute comparisons between myself and my nearest neighbours, in which the latter always

.

come off the worst. I can derive much inward relish and edification from this process of disparagement. I begin by bringing one Miss Hammersley to the bar of my inner consciousness; I compare her with a certain Salvia Richmond, in whom I am slightly interested.

Now Lucy Hammersley is the incumbent's daughter in the next valley, Stonesdale by name, which lies just across the shoulder of yonder down. Well, Lucy's position and mine are nearly analogous, so I am naturally anxious to put her at some disadvantage;—a generous emulation is the key-note of intimate feminine friendship. Therefore, whispers of vanity assure me that in the matter of marking kitchen dusters, Lucy is nowhere in our domestic competition; while all the world knows that I should shudder to tie up a jam-pot as clumsily as she does. So in her performances on the church harmonium; I sincerely pity Lucy for her "wooden" way of playing, and for that abominable trick she has of recklessly slipping her notes. I reflect with pardonable pride that though our

Redburn instrument cost three pounds less than did theirs at Stonesdale, yet under my fingers it can discourse really creditable music. I no less sincerely regret that Miss Hammersley, poor thing! from the fault of her figure should be so spoilt by an evident stoop in her shoulders. It is a pity, also, that she has such a thick way of speaking; although in a prettier person this, perhaps, might be palliated as a lisp. Dear Lucy could not, it is true, remedy either defect by any volition of her own; yet she might make her dresses fit a little better, and her bonnets need not sit upon her head, as if chance-thrown there by a pitch-fork, still——

Here we are, landed again in a second futile blind alley of speech. While picking poor Lucy to pieces in a string of spiteful sentences, I have come, as I deserved, to another ignominious standstill. This clearly imports that somehow my censure has recoiled upon me censorious. Must I not allow that, despite her catalogue of drawbacks, Lucy Hammersley is in one respect better off

than her self-constituted critic? Let me question myself, if this be not so. I indeed plead guilty to some such dimly adumbrated conviction. Well, the Stonesdale curate would never fascinate me, and I am sure that Lucy is welcome to her conquest. Indeed, the readiness with which Charles Meadows came forward, as they say at sales, "without reserve," ought, as it does, to cover a multitude of his lesser demerits in dear Lucy's eyes. As it is, the poor creatures must resign themselves to the slow torture of an indefinite engagement, the days of which, could they be reckoned backwards, would turn Lucy again into quite a little trot. It is just within human credibility that a patron may appear to Charles Meadows in the interim. Indeed, the curate stoutly affirms that the special providence which promotes improvident marriages is even now wafting this bird of promise to the secluded vale of the curate's love and labour. Well, we will hope that a patron is really on his way. I suppose that Lucy can hardly think of having

any bridesmaids; and under the circumstances a bonnet will be more suitable than a lace veil. But, as these questions need not be decided for another generation, I move their present adjournment, and descend the vicarage stairs at two steps a time, equipped for a sunny scamper up there among the juniper bushes.

I distinctly mean to revolt! Let this summer gale answer for it, which comes laden with the incense of many clover fields. Let the smooth, long hills, where mighty shadows wane and pass, see to it. Let the glamour of yonder shining cliffs atone for my defection. The very poplars at our roadside are whispering me into rebellion. Caution suggests that the seasons and observances of our little hamlet-world are not rashly to be set aside. Youth, a mutineer, replies that liberty is sweet. Therefore, on this special morning I shall *not* pledge myself to return in time for breakfast. Tea and toast are very mundane considerations. To find the mountain buds hardly awake in their dewy cradles ought to compensate me.

Here my ascent begins along one of innumerable sheep-walks; it skirts the edge of a chalk pit and is, here and there, a dizzy enough track for any one with an indifferent head for such expeditions. Now we fairly breast the shoulder of the hill, and the real pull of the business commences. Heigho! Let us pause a second for breath. I am likely to spoil another pair of boots soon. My right heel wears sadly already out of the perpendicular; and they were new at Easter. My father drew a long face enough at my last account for shoe-leather from Stembury. Would he prefer some poor Chinese doll with cramp in her feet, to his present mountaineer incumbrance? I should detest a limp, spaniel-like daughter, with full eyes and tawny ringlets; one who nestled all day in the hearth-corner, whimpering at each keen scud from the east that shook the window-frames. Deliver me from a moping girl! I would rather pay for shoe-leather than sal-volatile. So here we go, up, up, up!

Two minutes are again allowed for rest at

this platform. I have designated this spot my half-way house to cloud-land. It is a most notable harbour among our hills for orchids. The bee and the fly and the green man all abound here. That sounds a comical trio, does it not? The bee orchis is my brown pet among them all. See what a swollen lip of pouting velvet it puts up at me. To gather the darling would be absolute murder. Save thee, sweet, from all those musty botanists, who with tin box and trowel grub about these hills. May none of them, leaving havoc in their wake, penetrate to my aerial garden! Every juniper bush seems dotted over this morning with brisk little banded snails. Take this spray, for instance, whence they hang like a cluster of miniature sailors on a vessel's mainyard. Look down on our village now. From this height it seems dwarfed to a heap of peas or a few shirt-buttons. One would fancy that a single blanket tossed down at random would extinguish the whole community. What a cramped nook it verily seems to contain a girl's whole existence!

Continuing my ascent, I nearly stumble over a meditative sheep, who does not think me worth moving for. His friends are assiduously crunching away, some paces higher up ; but this animal, wiser in his generation, declines to shorten his own days by fattening too speedily. My feet are now planted on the top story at last. I am now alone with the skies on the level back of the mountain. The real solitude of the downs begins at this point, and intensifies as I recede from the slope by which I ascended.

Now, having come so far, shall I cross the flat top of this ridge, and peep over into the houses of the next valley ? I should like to see if the calumniated Lucy Hammersley is awake yet. I can guess by the smoke at their kitchen chimney ; or, another plan, shall I select a sunny ledge for repose and go no further ? I am not a nervous girl, but I do not like crossing this dreary breadth of table-land. I confess that only so long as I can see my bitterly abused friend, the valley, do I feel re-assured and stout-hearted. But when

only one level mountain plain intercepts all other landscape, I do own to feeling very desolate indeed. Blue ether, nothing else, except some clouds unpleasantly near and racking over uncomfortably fast, are not exhilarating companions. All which apprehensions I decide, in a sudden access of hardihood, are utterly nonsensical, since, beyond a rook or a rabbit, I shall meet nothing worse than my own shadow. So away I plunge at a brisk rate, setting my face resolutely to accomplish the transit. There is a keen spice of enterprise in thus daring to enlarge the limits of my solitary rambles. A sense of novelty braces me up and urges me forward. I become flushed and exhilarated. How groundless now my late hesitations appear! I shall look over upon Lucy's roof in five minutes—— Ah!

With one smothered cry I had sprung instinctively backwards. So suddenly had I found myself with *it*, face to face, that I felt my limbs becoming as useless as those of a sleeper; and strange lights began to dance

before my eyes. Presently, I say presently, though all this occurred in an infinitesimal moment of time, came a reaction. Fear gave way to something akin to curiosity. The whole experience presented there to my vision was so utterly new, that I passed, so to speak, beyond fear. The sight was so wholly strange, so keenly awful, that it began to affect me with a feeling of wonder rather than terror. I became more curious, though the term is inadequate, than horror-stricken.

For something had come to lie suddenly at my very feet—a shape, blurred yet rigid, with one arm under its head. I can never forget the intense pathos of that sharp white face alone there under heaven in the utter mountain solitudes; there it lay, pinched and drawn—the dreadful dead face of a young man, very worn and wasted, very quiet and cold; but the climax to its terribleness was—how shall I write it?—that the mouth actually *smiled!*

I did not shrink now, nor faint, nor fall down. Some hidden and unguessed-at re-

serve of strength seemed to be sustaining me. I managed to recoil a few steps, and there I stood, transfixed, frozen, palpitating. Once, I had some idea of flight, that woman's refuge ; but a more imperious fascination rooted me to the spot ; and, stranger still, after a moment's respite, actually nerved me to draw near once more, and even to bend down over that ghastly mystery.

Beautiful or ghastly ? I declare that I knew not which. I incline to believe that to the unsuperficial eye it was lovely, but very terrible. Let me explain that I, Salvia Richmond, had never up to this moment looked upon death. On this subject my father held peculiar views, which I now believe were wrong ones. The outcome of these was my careful seclusion through childhood from all sights likely to disturb my imagination. I was, in a degree, grateful to my father then ; for I felt convinced that, had not this been my first experience of death, I should have been immeasurably more terrified. As it was, I derived a kind of

spurious calmness from thinking how utterly *unlike* this was to anything which I had ever previously beheld. For they, who compare with death any phase of sleep or stupor, must be poor and careless observers indeed.

He had been a young man, poor fellow! some thirty years of age. I do not think that his features could ever have been pleasing, although they were singularly regular. I had seen many such a head in looking over engravings of pictures by the old masters. His attire was poor and threadbare, but neat, and in places carefully mended. When the mind is much excited, it often evinces a tendency to dwell upon trivial details. I also observed that one of his boots was much broken out at the side. I should have guessed this poor fellow as the usher in a school, or possibly as a bookseller's assistant. He was, perhaps, not what is usually called a gentleman; so far I fancied that I could not well be mistaken. Neither was he a denizen of these parts, nor, I believed, of any country neighbourhood. His poverty was the penury

of the town, not the want of the rustic. From what city, then, had he wandered, to sink down exhausted in this land of clouds, among this waste of heather? His useless staff had escaped from the numb, nerveless fingers, and there it lay near them, in the coarse mat-grass of the summit. His cloak, a poor flimsy thing, was thrown back from his chest, as if in a supreme movement for air. In its side pocket I remarked the corner of a little volume. I drew this reverently forth, being calm enough to hope that this might furnish some evidence of the personality of the pale wanderer. It proved the kind of book which ought to be found on a dead person—one of prayer. I felt somehow calmer and happier after this discovery. As to any clue, there was something, but not much. I found pasted down upon the fly-leaf a poor, soiled little picture of a flower, rudely drawn and roughly coloured; under this came one word, "Rose." It might have been torn out of a child's lesson-book, where instruction is conveyed by rude woodcuts of

homely natural objects. At least, that was my guess. I cannot describe what a pitiful pathetic scrap of old domestic joy it seemed to me, as I perused it up there alone with that white face and the racking clouds. I could discover nothing else between its leaves, so I judged it best to replace the volume ; and this I managed to do, though with no very steady hand.

This done, I had sense enough to know that my next duty was to descend and obtain assistance from our village. Therefore, with one last wistful look at those sharp features, I turned myself away and began to retrace my steps. In actual time I do not believe that more than two minutes had elapsed since my first sight of the dead man when I turned to depart. Judging by the variety and rapidity of my sensations, I might have been watching above those filmy eyes for years. I have left out as yet all mention of the eyes, and I really cannot bring myself to write about them. Indeed, the above allusion has slipped quite in-

voluntarily from my pen. Well, the strange thing was, that no sooner was I out of the presence—an actual presence to me—of the dead man, than I began rapidly to give way. This sounds, of course, exceedingly inconsistent; but such, I declare, was the veritable fact. So quickly did I feel my self-command beginning to ebb, that to this hour, it is with me a matter of wonder, how I had strength and vitality enough to accomplish my journey of return. This much I recall, that again and again, from sheer exhaustion, was I compelled to pause in my downward course. Sometimes a simple halt sufficed, at others I sank actually down on the hill-side. Strange mists and points of light were beginning to swim before my eyes; rushes of cold darkness had begun to threaten my consciousness; but on, on, still I laboured, and at length I stood once more in our village main street. Years seemed to have elapsed since with elastic steps I had traversed it on that very morning. The vehement emotions of the last few hours appeared to have added months to my

life since daybreak. More than this; my personal relations with each well-known village face at the different doors seemed altered in that interval and utterly transformed. I cannot quite explain this; but I somehow felt that, as the sole repository of a ghastly mystery, I had now transcended my commonplace self of yesterday. In fact, had I not experienced the icy chills of an incipient faintness upon me, I believe I should have held my head an inch or two higher, and advanced along Redburn High Street with a step of more than ordinary importance. I set down these strange and almost grotesque impressions just as they arose. Faithful is their transcript, although it may provoke a reader's smile.

When I entered our small parlour, the Reverend Hamilton Richmond, vicar of Redburn, and parent to the present humble deponent, had already concluded his morning meal. He had drawn his chair away to his working-table in the bay window, where the best light accessible in our room could be

thrown upon his occupation. Before him were spread out a multitude of red and white pill-boxes. In a word, the vicar was engaged in what I profanely used to call, ticketing his snails and mussels; but this occupation my father more sonorously and euphoniously described as arranging his series of land and fresh-water mollusca. On most days, Mr. Richmond was wont to prelude his more serious parochial duties by taking after breakfast a spell of recreation at his collection of these—what shall we say?—beasts.

“You are very late, my dear,” said the vicar, in a tone of the mildest reproof. “I never shall master the secret of that most stubborn of tea-urns. Twice have I scalded my fingers; once I have deluged the table-cloth; therefore, in your future absences, I shall henceforth prudently confine myself to milk.”

“I am so sorry,” I faltered; “but——”

Had the vicar’s attention been less deeply concentrated upon the dried mummy of a garden slug, he must have noticed my un-

usual agitation; as it was, he broke in at this point cheerfully, "There, say no more, and brew yourself some tea. Cold tea for truants, such as you deserve. Now, don't loiter, there is a good girl; for I have twenty matters to arrange with you before I sally forth upon my parish rounds, and I will not tease you with one of them until you have eaten something."

"I am going to begin," I said hurriedly, and pretended to butter a piece of toast.

How hopeless at that instant it did seem to find an appropriate preface to my terrible discovery! There sat the vicar, placidly examining his "specimens," a broad smile of satisfaction playing across his dear old face, as he inspected something about the size of a pin's head through a magnifying glass. Here stood I, his daughter, like a battery already charged, about to electrify the parsonage and its occupants. So there I was staring down upon the vicar's bald head, and as yet I could not bring myself to give word or sign of my secret. At length, as it were to help myself

on with my announcement, I laid a trembling hand upon his shoulder.

"Done?" exclaimed my father, without looking round. "The downs have not given you much appetite. So I come to question the first of my parochial twenty. Imprimis, Is Sally Webb to have any more flannel for her baby? Next——"

"Father," I entreated, "do leave those tiresome shells alone for a few moments, and attend to me."

"Eh?" said the vicar, surprised, but continuing, however, to write in a spider hand upon one of his pill-boxes.

"I have had no breakfast," I pursued, uneasily fidgiting with the table-cloth, "and you would have needed none had you been with me on Stonesdale Ridge this morning."

"Humph!" said the vicar; "in fact, you have overdone yourself, and I half think it serves you right."

"No, father," I faltered; "at least, I *am* tired, but that is not the worst of it. I am sorry—to have to inform you—that I have

found—something—up there.” And here I came once more to a dead stop.

“One of Farmer Digweed’s southdowns in trouble, I suppose?” hazarded the vicar, rather petulantly. “Well, I really do not see the necessity of your turning amateur deputy-shepherd. Still, we must send him word. Touch the bell, my dear,” and he actually took up another pill-box.

“Father!” said I, in a hoarse, unnatural voice.

At length the vicar looked round, and our eyes met. One glance at his daughter was sufficient. Upsetting his red boxes, and strewing the floor with tickets and snail-shells, my father came hurriedly towards me. “In the name of Heaven, child, what has befallen you?”

“Only this,” I replied slowly, gaspingly, and with intermittent pauses, for words were becoming a weariness, and I had to drum with one hand upon the table to keep myself from going; “this only—I have found a dead man, half-way across Stonesdale Ridge, and,

oh, father, I wish some one would go and cover up that poor white face of his." And, having unburdened my mind of its tidings, I fainted comfortably away.

CHAPTER IV.

A RURAL INQUEST.

MR. GILBERT ARCHER, gentleman at large and emigrant in prospect, dined at a certain coffee-house of some repute in the days of "Goldy," "Bozzy," and the great Doctor, called the Pied Bull, and seated under the shadow of St. Paul's, on the evening of his interview with Julian Leyland. The resources of this establishment and the ready forethought of its waiter impressed Archer so favourably, that he repeated his visit on four successive evenings. On the last of these nights he came in as usual, after a rather tiring day. A number of details connected with his outfit, and a series of interviews connected with his creditors, sent Gilbert

Archer to his dinner in a somewhat desponding mood. To counteract these sinister influences, he felt himself compelled to supplement his usual modest bottle of Burton ale by a pint of port wine. Still, as his meal proceeded, despite this generous stimulant, Archer fell into depths of dismalness yet more profound. He tried to read the evening paper, but he could not rivet his attention for more than five consecutive minutes on its columns. From sheer tedium of solitude he began talking to the waiter; but the waiter was so full of a recent suicide in the neighbourhood, that Archer found him, in his own present dejection, most indifferent company. Then Archer tried to go to sleep, but that did not succeed either. All at once, his thoughts set in the direction of Julian Leyland. With some self-reproach he reflected that he had neither given his sick friend, the commission as to letters, or Julian's Blankshire journey as a single thought since they had parted at Islington. But now, in the meditative moments which succeeded a solitary dinner,

Archer began to wonder whether Julian would really bring his uncle, the baronet, to terms; if he really meant to sell his expectations to Ivory; and whether, suppose he did not, Julian would ever live long enough to succeed to the Redburn estate. Surely, thought Archer, it would be much pleasanter to stay at home as Julian's factotum in a large country house, than to set sail across such a waste of waters. Would kind Atropos ever deftly snip the reigning baronet's thread?

From this he fell to thinking how malleable Julian would become beneath a friend's judicious management. This and much more did Archer debate with himself, now throwing his head back to yawn, now leaning forward to sip his port. At length, wearying with the tenor of his reflections, he gave himself a final protesting shake, and bent down resolutely once more to peruse his neglected evening paper. He had not been thus occupied for five minutes, when he stumbled across a certain paragraph, the sight

of which chased every vestige of colour from his face, and drew from his lips an involuntary exclamation of dismay. Luckily the coffee-room was vacant of other occupants, and the waiter was asleep in a corner upon a pile of plates and napkins. So unobserved, but with trembling hands, Archer read as follows :—

“STARVED TO DEATH.—A tragical occurrence is telegraphed to us by a provincial correspondent. The body of a young man has been discovered on the downs above the village of Redburn, near Stembury, in Blankshire. It is presumed that exhaustion and insufficient nourishment were the causes of death. The clothing of the deceased person indicates a humble position in life. As yet no clue of any consequence has been obtained to the stranger's identity. An inquest will be held during Thursday next, May the 10th, at the Merlin Inn, Redburn. We understand that a handsome reward is likely to be offered for any information tending to throw light upon this mysterious circumstance.”

Gilbert Archer could not fail by an in-

stantaneous intuition to connect this paragraph with the journey of Julian Leyland. Both shocked and startled at this intelligence, he remained for some moments too much overcome to reflect upon what action it now behoved him to take in this emergency. Despite his many and serious failings, Archer was really not a bad-natured person; where no sacrifice of his own interests happened to be involved, he was ready enough to do a good turn for a friend or a comrade. Therefore, having presently recovered to some extent his self-possession, the first question which Archer debated was whether Julian could with a certainty, absolute and irrefragable, be connected with the subject of the forthcoming inquest at the Merlin. Age, character of attire, place of death, all and each pointed to his unfortunate friend. Previous ill health made the sudden end in that friend's case not wholly unaccountable. Yet, vagrants died in the ditches all England over in every month of the year; and this might, after all, be only one of that nomadic

brotherhood. Still, the whole existence, up to this point, of Julian Leyland had been so unfortunate, his social surroundings so exceptional, that Archer could not help mentally comparing the life of his friend with one of those stories which, from the very first pages of their inception, convince us that they mean to end in some bad and startling way. In fine, the previous from-pillar-to-post career of Julian augured a final catastrophe, and now apparently such promise had been verified. All which reasoning Archer suspected to be very fanciful ; but his was not a logical mind.

“ Poor fellow ! ” ran the current of Archer’s thoughts, “ he never would do anything like anybody else, while I have known him in the land of the living ; therefore, he is just the man to drop down dead out of utter perversity, where nobody knew him. Hold there, however ! he is found almost at his uncle’s gate. The newspaper must have tripped. He will be certainly claimed and recognized at Redburn of all places in the world. And yet—— Ought I to write this very night and

warn Sir Sidney Leyland? Clearly no, while one grain of doubt remains, I ought not. Again, why should I be forward in rendering these consequential Leylands any service? Let them claim and bury their own dead, if theirs this waif of cold humanity turn out to be. Some old servant of the family must know the nephew. Write I dare not, till I have seen with my own eyes; and why should I rush half across this kingdom on, perhaps, a fruitless and certainly an expensive errand? If this be Julian, after all, who will repay my travelling expenses, if the faithful retainer, above alluded to, have been beforehand with me? Then, my time is short in England, and my preparations for departure are yet incomplete. Also, I do not greatly care in my present embarrassed circumstances to bring myself into the full glare of public notice by figuring as the chief witness in this case. And yet, this poor fellow was my friend, and if I lay unclaimed at a Blankshire beershop, I should expect some one to take the trouble of owning me. By Heavens! I

was never in a more lamentable state of uncertainty. What shall I do? whom shall I turn to for advice? There is absolutely nobody."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, waking up in the distance with a start; "there is somebody; only I had just taken forty winks. Beg your pardon, sir, I am sure; what is the next order?"

"I was thinking aloud," replied Archer, a little disconcerted—"a bad habit, waiter, of which I mean in future to break myself. No, my good fellow, I require nothing at this particular moment. But, as you have presented yourself at my elbow, give me your opinion on this paragraph in the evening newspaper."

Men in perplexity have recourse, all the world over, to strange confidants; and this impulsive appeal to the attendant may be paralleled in the experience of many persons more exclusive than Gilbert Archer in the choice of their acquaintances.

The waiter spelt out, not over readily, the

lines submitted to his opinion ; and, screwing his mouth up on one side, shook his head in a meaning manner ; then gravely refolding the paper, he handed it back to his questioner.

“ Well ? ” said Archer. “ Speak up, man ! ”

“ My opinion is,” returned the waiter, with sententious reluctance, “ that this is a pound more for the coroner, and a funeral more for the parish.”

“ Assuredly,” said Archer ; “ but suppose—a mere supposition—you strongly suspected that you could put a name to this body ; how then ? ”

“ I should go in for the reward,” exclaimed the man with alacrity, pocketing both his knuckles and half a napkin as he spoke. “ And since they have not named the figure yet, I should keep my tongue inside my teeth, and myself in the background, until they brought themselves to fix its valuation.”

“ And till then ? ” inquired Gilbert, mechanically.

“ I should not go about the country, volunteering to swear for nothing. Not

likely, indeed!" and the waiter rounded off this protest rather neatly by a smart flick with his napkin, at a large recurrent blue-bottle.

"I never gave that part of the question a thought," said Archer, abandoning hypothesis for assertion. "Still, cash is cash, and I might run down to Blankshire. Hand me the Bradshaw; I declare that I have half a mind to go."

"Lord!" said the waiter; "if I was lucky enough to be favoured with the acquaintance of this body, I should have a mountain of a mind to go, and a pebble of a mind to stay."

"I shall hesitate no longer," murmured Archer, bringing his fist down by way of emphasis upon the table before him.

When we are already disposed to do a thing, no incident is too trivial to add its grain of influence in confirming our anterior resolution. Thus, a chance reference to a tavern waiter went some way in deciding Gilbert Archer to undertake a night journey to Blankshire. A feather or a fool will easily

turn us into a path whither our inclination leads us. Of such motes and straws blown by the wind of chance is our life composed.

An hour afterwards, Archer found himself steaming away to the south-west in search of his missing comrade. Economy had necessitated a third-class carriage; but, encased in a shaggy overcoat, and fortified, as to his lower extremities, by a stout horse-cloth, Archer was not in such bad plight after all.

On goes the train, screaming and jolting, through the long, dark night, with sound and fire; through the dim silent land a meteor shaking out upon the gloom the loosened flame-flakes of its speed; or as a hurricane, beneath whose headlong impulse the solid earth is shaken like a marsh. On swings the train, still on! A station lies ahead, a small, blurred space of light. As with a short, sharp, double shriek of despair, the steam giant leaps into the lamps and flings itself through them. A momentary flash in the carriages, and, ere one can say "There!" the station lies far behind; and out we rush again, wailing

beneath the darkness. Yet no pause, and no arrest, though the night be dark as pitch, and every minute means a mile. A hundred leagues on there the warm south-west of England beckons our wild career. Now the echoing cuttings rattle as we pass; now we slide noiselessly as wool along the smooth embankments; passing some hill, half dark, half light, with the sprinkled star-points of a village nestled on its slope; racing the moon, now risen, who rides as fast as we are gliding, above her long blue drifts and cloud lines fleecy-fringed. Now heaven's side through our window is barred as some Titan king's treasury; now we curve into new skies flecked as with a myriad feathers; now we meet the lashing, blinding shower, and our roof reverberates as with hail; then even grey and starless night again. On swings the train, ever onwards! westward, ho! towards the Hesperian England. Whirling past brows of rustled woodland, waking its nested birds; beating on through flatsavenued with weary lines of poplar; dashing by white-sheeted

lakes, with mysterious underlight of waters ; clattering across ivied bridges, near church towers hoary blue, past cattle couched asleep among the shining mist, past the crisp, crowded flocks in their squared upland folds, past down and dale, heath-land and eddish, forest and field, the lonely road, the windmill on the waste, the mountain, the brook, haystacks, the clump of firs, homestead alive in light of cheerful tapers, graveyard asleep, steeped all in quiet moonbeam. Passing all this and myriad other night scenes, to ultimate haven, panting, shuddering, grinding, flaked with spots of dust-driving shower, stained with the soils of half a dozen shires, and so finally bounding with one fierce roar of triumph into Stembury station, just as the first new rosy thread of orient dawn was beginning to crimson the grey downs of Blankshire.

Archer crawled out upon the platform. with about one tithe of his consciousness still unsundered to the dominion of sleep. Here he stood, a strange, crumpled figure, shivering under the uncertain ray of a station gas-jet.

Twice he had to search his pockets over ; much of his portable property had to be exhumed piecemeal from strange corners of his coat-lining, before he was able to satisfy the requirements of the ticket-porter. This feat at length accomplished, Archer was pushed out into the darkness beyond the station entrance ; and the wicket, with a snap, locked behind him for the night.

Quivering in every limb from the keen morning air, he reeled on towards the town. After a few yards' progress, Archer instinctively bent his steps in the direction of a square lamp of ruby-coloured glass, which reminded one of its cousin-german over many a doctor's door, and hung out into the night like a beacon, signalling the weary voyager with letters of light, signifying "Royal Railway Hotel."

Frequent appeals upon a broken-down bell-handle succeeded in arousing a night porter, who struck a light, and, blinking heavily, inducted Archer into a sleeping apartment on the ground floor ; the room had affinities

both to a diving-bell and to a coal-cellar. Here, between a pair of sheets with a mouldy odour and uncertain aspect, Archer sought repose, until the fuller day should begin. Presently, falling into a broken sleep, he dreamed that he was sailing in Julian's company to Australia; and that, while pacing the deck with his friend, he beheld various bailiffs, whom he knew perfectly well by sight, swimming after and around the vessel, in the guise of a merry shoal of porpoises. "Boots," knocking at the door with warm water, recalled Archer to the actualities of waking life. Would the visitor want any breakfast, and should a polish be given to his pair of wellingtons? Both questions were affirmatively decided.

Did "Boots" know the distance to Redburn? "Boots" believed that village to be a fairish spell away; but volunteered the information that "a party" at that moment breaking his fast in the coffee-room had ordered a trap to go there. Was that gentleman going to an inquest? Yes, the party

was going in that direction, and the party was connected with a local newspaper; had heard him say as much. If the gentleman in bed paid half, would the gentleman at breakfast be likely to offer him a seat in his vehicle, since their destination was the same? The "Boots" would see. Question incontinently referred to the breakfaster. Re-appearance of the attendant, with the compliments of the Press gentleman, and could the party in bed be ready in half an hour? The imbedded personage indubitably could be prepared for a start within that period. The bargain concluded, and half the tractional powers of the inn quadruped duly placed at Archer's disposal. Whereon, this unrisen gentleman must incontinently spring wildly out of bed, and commence to fling on his garments, adjuring "Boots" to expedite the preparation of certain eggs and bacon.

In forty minutes the chance comrades had embarked from the door of the Royal Railway Hotel in a damp and narrow fly, inside which, to gain elbow-room, the occupants

perforce seated themselves face to face. How the carriage creaked and rattled along the old-fashioned pavements of the town! It was no use talking until they got upon the more even turnpike road. Pending which, Archer took some mental stock of his companion.

The representative of the provincial Press proved himself to be a round little personage, with a snub nose, a shock head of dry wiry hair, a low forehead, round black eyes, protruding teeth, a short bull neck, and very inky fingers. His voice was much too loud to bear in its volume any proportion to his size. He was restless, cheerful, and discoursed in abrupt, galvanic utterances.

"My card, sir," he began, presenting it to Archer with a bow. "Sinclair Blaggs, of the *Western Juno*, at your service."

Gilbert was much honoured by the intelligence.

"Bound on the same errand?"

"Meaning the inquest? Yes."

A slight pause ensued.

"Sad business indeed," observed Mr. Blaggs, after using a tooth-pick.

"A sad one to *me*," said Archer, with a slight emphasis on the pronoun.

"Eh?" rejoined the other, alertly producing a note-book and a pencil-case. "A relative, I presume."

"N-no," said Archer, nervously; "not at all—I mean only—on general grounds—a most lamentable occurrence."

"Then I see before me," said Blaggs, with a glance of curiosity, "a fellow-pilgrim in the stony paths of literature?"

As no one but a relative or a journalist was likely to attend a remote country inquest, Archer in reply perforce accepted the last hypothesis of Mr. Blaggs. "Another member of the Fourth Estate," nodded Archer. Five minutes back, Archer felt greatly inclined to be confidential with Sinclair Blaggs, but the sight of the note-book had changed his mood.

"Our profession," observed Blaggs, pocketing the note-book, "is not socially recognized as it ought to be."

"We move the world," said Archer, modestly.

"London Press, or provincial?" was the next query.

"I ran down last night from London," explained Archer, with a cough. "A daily journal of sporting and fashionable intelligence; the name I am not at liberty to divulge; I usually do the theatrical criticism. This inquest is by no means in my line. The tragedies which I attend are merely histrionic. But our junior, who does this style of thing, was yesterday arrested by his bootmaker. I wanted a blow in the country, and—here I am."

"It was hardly worth your coming down for," threw in Blaggs, with a yawn. "Your people will be disappointed. This case promised better at first. In fact, I telegraphed it up to one of the London evening papers."

"I know you did," said Archer.

"On fuller information," Blaggs went on, "the case may be pronounced, sensationally speaking, a failure. You see, a young lady found him; and I did hope that meant something meaty and appetizing to the public in

the way of delicate disclosures and the like. But it won't do," continued Blaggs, crest-fallen. "The girl never saw him before, and is above all suspicion. The life of a reporter is full of disappointments. No Press experience at the first blush, say, of a suicide, can tell whether it is going to turn out a parish matter or an imperial one; whether we are to give it six lines or a column and a half."

"Then I've taken a fruitless journey," observed Archer.

"You see," said Blaggs, argumentatively, "the public do not care about deaths from mere starvation, exhaustion, or other natural causes. I do not see how we can fairly expect the public *should* care. 'Found dead,' 'Found drowned'; what can be more monotonous?"

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Blaggs; except to the parties concerned," he added, in a lower voice.

"Now as to suicides," pursued the journalist, with an air of allowance; "why, suicides are in their way all very well. They are

useful as padding in the dead season, and far be it from me to depreciate them. But *toujours perdrix* won't do; and, like all good things, one can be glutted with them. Consequently, I regret to say, that even suicides do not arrest much public attention at the present time, unless their connections are good, or some collateral spice of scandal lifts them above the dead level of such occurrences."

"I wish that I had never come," said Archer, dropping his voice.

"Don't be downhearted!" cried Sinclair Blaggs, encouragingly. "We may extract some entertainment for the public out of this inquiry yet. One never knows when a game may not turn up. I confess that there are no promising features just at present: inanition, pockets empty, wardrobe deteriorated, no foul play, no relatives, merely a parish reward—nothing could well be tamer—yet, I repeat, one never knows."

"One never knows," echoed Archer, mechanically, and in deep abstraction.

"In fact," pursued the journalist, volubly,

not noticing his companion's pre-occupation, "I nearly sent the boy, whom we keep to put our shutters up, as my deputy ; and felt half-inclined to transport myself to the Leatherbarrow school feast, where several ladies of quality are expected to carry round the tea-mugs."

"Will, for instance, Lady Leyland officiate among these amateur Hebes?" asked Archer, rousing himself abruptly.

"Not she!" insisted Blaggs, with a curl of the lip. "The cream of our county society are away in London for the season, her ladyship among them. A fine woman, Lady Leyland."

"Very much so," answered Archer, coldly. "Then the Priory is shut up?"

"Tight; all the furniture tied up in brown holland," supplemented Blaggs. "It is a fine possession—very."

"Are things well done there?"

"Judge for yourself," said the other, with enthusiasm; "four and twenty servants; two men in tights, black silk stockings, gold bands,

and powder; another in evening costume; phaetons, pony-carriages, barouches, saddle-horses; a frontage by Inigo Jones; a deer-park since the times of the Heptarchy; my lady an elegant dame, the baronet a finished gentleman! They live in palatial style, and give away a bull piecemeal to the poor every Christmas. They are, in fact, credits to themselves, and blessings to the neighbourhood. There!"

"Any family?" inquired Archer, casually.

"Why no; more's the pity," returned Blaggs, quite out of breath with enthusiasm; "the place will go to a nephew, they say. A bad lot, sir, this nephew."

"Dissipated?"

"They do say outrageous. At least, Sir Sidney will never receive him; and that proves him bad indeed, as the baronet is not the man to object to a *little* gentlemanly wildness. I pity Sir Sidney most unfeignedly, for, somehow or other, a rumour is rife in these parts, that this young fellow——" Here Sinclair Blaggs stopped

provokingly dead short, just as the features of his listener had begun to assume an expression of deep attention.

"You were saying——" reminded Archer, nudging the narrator with his knee.

"That I meant," pursued the reporter, discursively, "with your permission to light a cigar.

"By all means," assented Gilbert Archer, gulping down his disappointment. "What a distance this village is! but you were alluding to some rumour. Eh! Good God! What is that?"

This exclamation bore reference to a small photograph, which the journalist had laid down beside him on the back-seat cushion of the vehicle. Mr. Blaggs had produced this among other articles during a search in his pockets for a box of fusees.

"Oh! that," explained Sinclair, carelessly raising the portrait for a nearer scrutiny, "is merely the deceased. I pocketed the *carte* at starting, and forgot quite that I had it about me."

"Will you allow me——?" said Archer, in a hoarse voice, and with a twitching of his under-lip.

"Ah! there he is!" commented the reporter, leisurely holding the likeness at different distances for critical inspection; "taken after death, an effort of local talent. Only so—so, as a work of art. They sent us a presentation copy, of course, to our office. Fancy my forgetting this! See here, the left side of the forehead is sadly out of focus; though I don't suppose, in this case, it was the sitter who moved. Ha! ha! upon my soul, not bad that!"

"Excellent!" said Archer, who had turned all kinds of colours during a brief perusal of the photograph, and now handed it back with a kind of involuntary stifled groan.

"You don't look well," said Blaggs, glancing in Archer's direction.

"It is a ghastly subject," replied the other, with a shudder. "The fact is that I am not case-hardened yet to these kind of investigations. Then I fancied also—mere fancy, of

course—that I once knew some one like this. How imagination runs away with a man! I suppose that we shall be permitted to view the—original.”

“The Press,” said Sinclair, proudly, “has a free pass anywhere. I should like to see them try to keep us back. But take my advice, and stay outside. It will not seem creditable to our profession if you were to betray any emotion. The jury might look down upon you. Come, late hours or something else has impaired your nerve. Smith, of the *Leatherbarrow Herald*, went off in just the same way. Look’ee here, if I hit upon anything at the view, which admits of sensational treatment, you shall go halves. There, I cannot say fairer than that.”

“You oblige me greatly,” answered Archer, awkwardly, blowing his nose; “I *have* been lately overdoing myself. But this—I mean that horrid likeness—being gone, I am myself again. Let us talk of something else—say, these Leylands; you were upon the reprobate nephew of the house; you had it, if I rightly

remember, upon the tip of your tongue to mention some rumour about this scapegrace."

"Rumour?" doubted Blaggs, knocking his cigar-ash off against the handle of the fly door. "Our provincial world is full of rumours; but of Sir Sidney's nephew I know nothing definite. Some say he is abroad, some in jail, some in the workhouse. Now where such a reprobate is, matters mighty little on his own account; but——"

"Pray proceed," said Archer; "you interest me."

"Well," resumed Blaggs, rather grudgingly, "don't quote me for this as your informant; but county gossip will have it that this nephew has some pull upon the Redburn property; and might, if he chose, do mischief."

"Then Sir Sidney ought to conciliate him," was Archer's comment.

"Sir," returned the journalist, firmly, "it is impossible to conciliate an adder."

"A bad business," said his companion. "Would I were a hundred miles away! Is this the village which I see ahead through

the apple trees? What a queer little cluster of red-tiled roofs and thatched cottages!"

"Ay, ay," nodded Blaggs, cutting a pencil and blowing the chips off his knees; "that is the picturesque clock-tower of Redburn Church. It has fragments of Norman work, and fine tombs of the Leyland Crusaders. That is Sawney Beacon, of Spanish Armada fame. There is Stonesdale Ridge over-hanging the village, where the subject of this inquiry was picked up. That path is a short cut across the downs to Stembury, by which foot-passengers and poor devils without horse or trap can shorten the way by two miles or so. You noticed how infernally tortuous our road has been to dodge the spurs and shoulders of the downs? However, we are here at last. And now for the inquiry."

The journalist had hardly concluded before the fly drew up with a jerk at the front door of a country inn; above whose entrance swung suspended the effigy of a panel-painted hawk-like bird, explained beneath in dingy letters as a merlin. For, inasmuch as the

Leylands owned this hostelry, they had thought good to suspend over its portals their own armorial crest. The iron rod which supported the sign-board entered the wall about six inches from the window of one of the front upper rooms. In this room the blind was tightly drawn down, but the window-sash was drawn up about three inches.

Around the inn porch were congregated a knot of some twenty male rustics. At intervals in the road beyond, clusters of red-elbowed farm-wives were shrilly discussing the leading topic of the day. The whole juvenile population of the village had naturally mustered to celebrate such an occasion.

Two members of the rural police flanked the entrance of the Merlin, like undertakers who had forgotten their mufflers.

The executive and Sinclair Blaggs were on terms of old and intimate acquaintance, inasmuch as their respective callings often led them in similar directions. So one of the policemen touched his hat as the fly stopped,

and came forward to facilitate the egress of our voyagers by politely opening the carriage door.

“Ah, Picker! how are you?” said the reporter, returning the greeting. “Are they at it yet? I fancy we must be behind our time.”

“They are a-viewing of it now,” explained the constable, “in the first floor front, where that boy is just a-chucking in a pebble.—I will lock you up, you little rascal, if you do that again.—If you gents will cut in sharp upstairs, my mate here will pass you in alonger the jury.”

“How say you?” inquired the journalist of Archer; “will you ascend or await me here?”

“I prefer to remain at present where I am,” replied his companion, who was beginning again rather to lose colour.

“I applaud your decision,” said Blaggs, from within, with one hand on the baluster of the inn staircase. “It is all a matter of nerve and practice. This sort of thing comes as natural to me now as eating and drinking.

I shall leave you under Picker's wing. Take care of my friend, Picker. I shall not be long." So saying, the reporter disappeared upstairs, whence a great scuffling of feet, mingled with a monotonous drone of many voices, was very plainly audible.

Gilbert Archer remained chafing his hands and shivering, which, as the day was warm and genial, seemed a little strange. Presently, he proposed an adjournment to the bar, explaining that he felt rather faint, and thought he might be all the better for a mouthful of something. Would Mr. Picker give him the pleasure of his company? Picker received the proposition favourably, and the "something" was produced.

Archer, between gentle sips, inquired in a firmer voice whether any one had claimed the body. Picker, after drinking politely to Archer, replied that no one had yet done so; adding that whoever meant so to do had better look sharp. Archer next demanded if any of the Priory people were likely to attend the inquiry in person. The constable

thought not; indeed, on mature reflection, he felt convinced that none of the few servants remaining in charge at the Priory would feel sufficient interest to undertake the walk.

“When will they bury?”

“If possible on the same afternoon.”

“And if still unclaimed?” Archer added.

His informant, accepting the reservation, presumed that if friends arrived on the scene, they would wish things done in a superior style, and some postponement would be inevitable. Still, he supposed that when a man might exchange wardrobe with a field scarecrow, there would not be many friends on their way.

Here twelve pairs of hob-nailed boots, clattering down the narrow staircase like an avalanche, swept Gilbert Archer aside from the bar counter, and streamed on into the coffee-room. Last descended the representative of the *Western Juno*, making rapid shorthand notes as he came. Having filled one slip about halfway down, he put it into

his mouth, as both his hands were occupied, and at once began another page of hieroglyphics. As he passed, he beckoned Archer with one corner of his eye to follow him; but he never paused for one instant from his annotations.

So in the wake of Sinclair Blaggs, Archer elbowed himself into the hall of justice, represented for the nonce by the general room upon the ground floor of the Merlin public-house. This apartment had been roughly arranged as an impromptu court of official inquiry. An armchair was placed for the coroner at the head of the room between the two windows. Fronting him was a deal table, from which all properties savouring of the place had been removed, except a stray stand of paper spills, forgotten in the turmoil of preparation. The jury occupied two long, parallel, ale-house benches. They were seated six abreast, at right angles to the coroner. Most of them wore smock-frocks; but a minority had managed to produce Sunday coats, in which they seemed

eminently uncomfortable. Be it noted that the forelocks of not a few of these rustics evinced a decided tendency to hang over and into their eyes, after the manner of the eyebrows in terriers. In fact, on the theory that each individual man has some prototype in the animal kingdom, the judicial dozen might be roughly classed into terriers and foxes, with the former species slightly in the majority.

When the coroner had settled himself into his seat of dignity, and had arranged his papers out of a black leather snap-bag, he threw down the key of the room upstairs on to the table before him with a sounding bang, and announced, "Now, gentlemen, we are going to begin;" whereupon the twelve, nearly to a man, moistened their palms furtively, and left off whispering together. Once, during the progress of the inquiry, the coroner alluded to them as an enlightened body of men. At this compliment one small wizened countryman, with saucer eyes and a dumpling hat upon his knees, chuckled

biting the feather of his pen, "is anybody here present able to identify the remains upstairs?"

Sinclair Blaggs and Archer had, by the comity of the police, been provided with chairs behind the benches of the jury. At this point, Sinclair whispered to his companion that he had never assisted at an inquiry more hopelessly devoid of interest. Archer concurred carelessly, but, while he did so, the fingers of his right hand seemed to clutch his chair-back with unnecessary tenacity.

"Can't somebody swear to him—just for a joke?" suggested Blaggs, beneath his hand. "Come, fellow-traveller, out of very pity enliven these proceedings. Hang it, you saw some likeness in that photograph as we came along. Now is your time. Jump up and say so."

"Be quiet!" remonstrated Archer, with his face flaming up; "your merriment is ill-timed. See, the coroner is observing us. *I know nothing about the dead man upstairs.*"

"No one supposed you did," retorted Sin-

clair, with an angry grunt; "only some people can't take a bit of chaff."

"Hush!" returned Archer, propitiatively; "the coroner is just going to address the jury."

Thereupon the coroner lifted up his voice, and indirectly complimenting himself, commended the jury for the attention which they had shown, and praised the judicious manner in which they had conducted the present investigation. Here once again our previous friend with the saucer eyes ejaculated, "Good lad!" which proved to be the rural formula for the parliamentary, "Hear, hear." But inasmuch as the coroner slightly frowned in the direction of the speaker, this applausive utterance was not repeated. The coroner took occasion to insist that it was highly unfair upon the pockets of the parochial ratepayers, when persons in advanced stages of organic disease took upon themselves to meander about at large, without so much as a card or a luggage label upon them. He stigmatized such conduct as most unjust towards the

•

persons who were kind enough eventually to pick up these vagabonds. An address carried about the person would greatly facilitate reference in such extreme cases. Passing to the cause of death, the evidence was in this case clear enough. They had heard the opinion of an eminent authority, Mr. Ricketts; and he felt convinced that no man in that room would rashly dispute its scientific accuracy. Consequently, it would fully meet both the special circumstances of the case, and the evidence that day tendered before them, if they brought it in now as their verdict that this was the death of some person unknown, from natural causes. Here the coroner concluded with a smile of self-satisfaction; and proceeded to rub his hands and arrange his side hair. Whereupon, twelve rough heads all converged towards one point for about five minutes.

In due course, the foreman rose, gibbered, and, after scratching his head dubiously, quavered out in an uncertain voice, "We find that this man died from unknown and unnatural causes."

A titter from Sinclair Blaggs.

“‘Natural causes,’ my good man,” corrected the coroner, looking as solemn as he was able under the circumstances.

“Settle it your own way, master,” assented the rural foreman, in helpless resignation, resuming his seat; whence he confided in a lower key to his next bench-fellow, “Jigger me, if I call this natural; do thee, Bill?”

So it was settled the coroner’s own way accordingly; and the inquiry was just about to terminate, when, as the court was rising, the coroner asked the police inspector whether the interment could take place on that afternoon. The constable believed that it could. They had got over the preliminary difficulty between the parishes of Redburn and Stonesdale, on whose boundary line the deceased had been found; inasmuch as the Reverend Hamilton Richmond had personally undertaken the expense of the burial.

An impulsive poor-law guardian present here proposed three cheers for the vicar; but the coroner reminded the public that this

tribute to Mr. Richmond, however well deserved, was at that moment inappropriate, considering the melancholy circumstances under which they had assembled.

A further obstacle was interposed, however, by the arrival in the room at this juncture of Sir Sidney Leyland's land agent, Mr. George Slater, who pressed that the funeral should stand over for a day or two. His attention had lately been drawn to the fact that the part of Redburn churchyard in which paupers were usually deposited did by some oversight abut upon the church chancel, beneath which the forbears of the Leyland family reposed. He was apprehensive lest substantial injury might accrue to the brickwork, sides, and freestone coping of the vault, if any more pauper graves were excavated in this direction. Mr. Slater insisted that any slight delay to their friend above stairs was a matter of minor moment, as compared with their obligation to preserve inviolate the ancestral resting-place of this distinguished family. He trusted that there would arise no

further demur on the vicar's part against ending at once and for ever this most lamentable oversight. A part of the churchyard more remote ought clearly to be set apart for the reception of parochial bodies. He ventured to think it only decorous that these should be made to keep their sepulchral distance from the bones of baronets. His employer was now absent in the metropolis, but, pending instructions from that source, Mr. Slater felt himself compelled to resist to the uttermost the coroner's order for instant interment.

The coroner persisted that they should proceed at once with the funeral of this person unknown. The situation of the grave was a question which the vicar and Sir Sidney Leyland's land agent must settle between themselves. As the direct representative of the Crown, the coroner said that such local squabbles were wholly beyond and beneath his province.

Mr. Slater then bowed and withdrew.

This concluded the inquest, and the coroner

ordered his gig and restuffed his black bag with judicial muniments. Of Sinclair Blaggs he took a tender farewell, and, at departure, bowed graciously to Archer.

"A most vapid morning's work," yawned the reporter, slowly extending his arms. He was waiting now with Archer in the stable-yard of the Merlin, while the quadruped destined to draw them back was being persuaded, amid a fire of objurgations from a short-tempered ostler, to re-enter the shafts.

"Heigho!" said Archer, stamping his feet. "What a time this fellow is with that horse! I shall run in and have one more nip before we embark."

"You are doing pretty well to-day!" laughed Mr. Blaggs; "that makes number four. Well, look brisk, man."

"I can't help it," explained Archer, when after a brief absence he had returned, wiping his lips. "I do not know what has come to me. I am thoroughly dejected and out of sorts. I require keeping up. Upon my word, what they gave me in the bar went down as if it were spring water."

"Our trap is ready at last," said Sinclair Blaggs, with a shrug. "In you go. After you, sir."

"Stay," faltered Archer, with a wild kind of earnestness; "an impulse has seized me. Do not think me deranged, do not accuse me of morbid curiosity, but go upstairs I must, and see the object of this inquest. I shall not keep you long; the policeman has offered to pass me in. To save time, you can get inside and be settling yourself." And Archer disappeared into the house, without giving Sinclair Blaggs any time to reply or expostulate.

"Confound the fellow!" grumbled the reporter to himself. "He is as full of whims and crotchets as a wench. First he will, and then he won't, and finally he must, when the mare is in the shafts, and the drink is in his head. This London penman imbibes freely; that is only too evident." So the country reporter growlingly got into his carriage, and proceeded to expand an imitation leopard-skin travelling-rug; and, having folded this to his

satisfaction, began to whistle rather impatiently.

Gilbert Archer was not away long; but that short interval of absence had effaced every particle of natural colour from his countenance.

"Give the ostler another sixpence," called Blaggs through the carriage window; "I have thrown him my quota; and then jump in."

Archer's fingers were so tremulous that, while searching for the required gratuity, he scattered some of his loose change upon the pavement at his feet.

"Humph!" cried his comrade, petulantly; "we shall be here till night."

"My fingers are made of butter," said Archer, stooping in muddy search for his missing silver.

"You can dry them inside!" sneered the other. "Push him in, Picker, and shut the door."

At length Archer was ready. The constable put up the fly-steps, and saluted the

departing occupants of the vehicle. Then the lean mare that drew them moved on; and Redburn and the Merlin began to fade in the distance.

"Well," questioned Blaggs, with a curl of the lip, "was there any recognition in that front room?"

"None," replied Archer, with an effort; "naturally none. I went up for curiosity, not for recognition."

"Are you satisfied at last?" from the other, sarcastically.

"Abundantly," said Gilbert, with a shudder.

"A queer little hamlet that!" pursued Blaggs, more good-humouredly.

"Damn Redburn!" broke out Archer, vehemently. "It will not break my heart if I never set eyes upon this detestable village again."

"Damn Redburn, by all means!" assented Blaggs, carelessly, and he lit a cigar.

So Gilbert Archer turned his back upon Redburn; and in departure metaphorically shook off the dust from his feet against the

village of the inquest. In due time the chance companions reached Stembury; and, after many protestations of friendliness, departed their several ways—Blaggs to the office of the *Western Juno*, to write out his “copy” for the issue of next morning; Archer to the next available train that would carry him on wings of fire to the modern Babylon.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROSE IN THE PRAYER-BOOK.

I SHALL not dilate upon the profound sensation which my announcement caused in our household. I need not depicture the instantaneous change which came over the vicar's countenance; how the tidings spread to our kitchen, thence to the village apothecary's, after which in a few minutes' lapse they permeated Redburn like wild-fire. The farm hinds began to stand about the road with half-surprised, half-idiotic grins on their faces. The hen-wives congregated in garrulous clusters with aprons thrown across their heads. The school children began lisping out the intelligence to each other. Even the

farm curs seemed to be aware that something unusual was in the wind.

As regarded myself personally, for some minutes the outer world, which I had plunged in such confusion, remained a blank. The rushing of innumerable streams was in my ears, the dancing of multitudinous lights obscured my vision; until I emerged once more into the light of day and consciousness, with the sensation of being in a train and gliding out of a long, dark tunnel. I found myself once more in my small chamber, lying upon my bed, while my father and the village doctor bent anxiously over me.

After this I did well enough, and after an hour's quiet, except for a racking headache, I did not seem greatly the worse. My father would not leave me for some time, on the sound principle, as he told me afterwards, that the living ought to be attended to before the lifeless. Then, when his mind was at rest upon the subject of his child, and not before, did he ascend the down in company with the apothecary. Nearly the whole male

population of Redburn streamed up in a retinue at their heels. The plough was left in the furrow; the spade was thrown down in the garden; the scythe was cast aside (dangerously enough) among the half-mown meadow grass. Master and man, boy and grey-beard, stout and weak, up they marched, headed by the parson and the doctor; a quaint enough train they must have seemed on the hill-side, though I was not an actual eyewitness of their upward progress.

On gaining the summit plateau, they deployed into a long line; much as when Sir Sidney Leyland, with dogs, keepers, and hangers-on, used to walk the broad down-side turnip fields in the partridge season. By this simplest of field movements the search was neither arduous nor unduly prolonged. The dead wanderer was soon refound on the right flank of the line by an Aberdeen cobbler, naturalized in Redburn. In high feather at his discovery, he called out to every man, as the long line gathered in, to fetch each a

good heavy block of stone, and to pile these one upon another at the spot where the body lay. This the Scotchman called raising a cairn, after the approved Gaelic and Northern fashion. Furthermore, he detailed to the assembly, while the doctor was kneeling down and making some medical notes, that in the days of his youth, he, the same cobbler, had lighted in a similar hill-search upon the body of one David McPherson, of Ballater, who, while cooling his head in a water-course, on returning from a convivial gathering, had been unable to extricate it. They had built up David's cairn, there and then, of imposing dimensions and vast granite boulders, which strewn the glen-face ready to hand; in honour of which occasion the laird on whose property they were, had stood whiskey all round to those engaged in the search—a bright example indeed, which my father made no signs of emulating, albeit the narrating cobbler looked hard at him, while reciting this concluding episode in the fate of poor David McPherson.

When the doctor's inspection was done, a sheep-hurdle was fetched from the nearest fold; and on this they raised their melancholy freight, and carried him thus slowly down to our hamlet. The stoutest of the villagers relieved each other at intervals; more because the path was steep and slippery than because their burden was of any great weight, poor fellow! So the village was regained, and they ultimately deposited the remains in an upper room of the Merlin, our local inn. The landlord made no difficulty whatever about the reception of their load, and my father thought his alacrity commendable, and even told him so. I am sorry to say, however, that the inn-keeper observed, "that it would draw a good deal of drink to the house." After which statement the vicar forbore to pay him any further compliments. Still, the landlord was right, for I never remember the Merlin more crowded than during the next few days.

So the pale, shrunken face waited there to be claimed, just above all the clinking of

glasses and the reeking of pipes. Waited to be claimed! But no one ever came to perform this last office of love. No one owned him as kin; no one even knew him by sight or acquaintance. I believe that the police took all reasonable steps in the matter. Notices appeared in several papers, and in due course the inquest was held. I feared at one time that my presence would be required before this grisly tribunal; but, as I really did not feel equal to the ordeal, my father persuaded the court to dispense with my attendance. The vicar, however, in person was there, and told me that the proceedings were very brief, and that no material fact was elicited. Hardly any one came, outside the village, except two newspaper reporters, whose looks my father did not relish. They whispered much together, and their behaviour was at times anything but decorous. I forgot to say that the cause of death was heart disease, and the jury so brought it in. The funeral was a very quiet one, and took place on the same afternoon. Sir Sidney's agent

came to us when the inquiry was done, and blustered a good deal about some damage which the grave might do to the Leyland vault ; but my father managed to pacify him. I may just mention here that I subsequently carved a little wooden cross with my own hands to mark out the unknown stranger's resting-place among the many equally nameless grass-mounds in its vicinity. In about nine days, the proverbial limit of wonderment, our village had completely relegated the whole occurrence to the region of oblivion.

Stay ;—I have forgotten the horrid conduct of the village boys, who became my terror during the interval between the finding and the funeral. While their elders were drinking inside the Merlin, these urchins continued to haunt the outside of the house with a morbid fascination. They would keep peering between the blinds into rooms where they could see nothing. They would keep drumming upon the outer walls, as though he, who lay within, required awaking. Worse than this, the wicked little creatures re-

enacted the whole occurrence in a ghastly play-pantomime. One of their band would stretch himself out, stiff and stark, upon a neighbouring cinder heap, which did duty for Stonesdale Ridge. Here half a dozen other urchins would pretend to find him, with appropriate gestures of horror and surprise. Ultimately, one of their number, denoted as the doctor by the appropriate head-dress of a paper cocked hat, proceeded to feel the recumbent lad all over. The play would conclude by the rest carrying down the chief performer to the inn doorstep, upon which he was allowed to fall with a reverberating bump. This done, the young ruffians would take to their heels in all directions, amid peals of laughter.

I have hesitated to note down a reminiscence connected with this event, which is in itself so unworthy of record; yet let it stand, as its grotesque ghastliness impressed me very keenly at the time.

So the dead man was laid beneath the churchyard daisies, and forgotten; while our

small household resumed its calm, unchecked round of existence. Suns rose and set beneath my little window. The orchis was bright as ever on the mountain-head. The dove's lament came every morning from the leafy beech-woods; and the heart of *Salvia* Richmond seemed to make its little silent plaint in unison with the bird whose joy seems only a perpetual sorrow.

One more incident which hangs upon my melancholy discovery, and then let my pen pass to less serious themes. Every village has what is called the general shop, and Redburn was not behind the rest of the world in this particular. I only know that our general shop professed to supply every requirement of human nature, from dried herrings to smock-frocks, from hard-bake to prophetic penny almanacs. Caleb Buttifant, of the "store," challenged mankind in general, and Redburn in particular, to name any article in the whole range of commerce, which he did not profess himself perfectly ready to produce across his counter. Among the more

prominent items of his rather heterogeneous assortment, we might particularize — snuff, sugar-plums, mouse-traps, comforters, clay pipes, treacle, tops, plaisters, door-mats, starch, umbrellas, *and* cured bacon. We might continue the catalogue through the remaining space of our three volumes, but it is best to interpose a final “and.” Be it mentioned, however, that when Caleb Buttifant could not produce any one article demanded, his invariable formula of reply was that he happened just then to be out of this kind of goods. Had a customer required an Egyptian mummy or a rattlesnake, Caleb would, likely enough, have taken shelter behind this effective subterfuge. To the superficial eye, Caleb’s window only presented a jumble of human needs in juxta-positions the most grotesque ; a more intelligent survey might gather thence an interesting index of the requirements of a rural community in its lower stage of civilization ; among which wants, be it distinctly noted, that the demand for literature was clearly sparse and fitful.

Still, a few second-hand books would crop up in Buttifant's window now and then; but hitherto I had found there nothing of the slightest interest, beyond one odd volume of "Clarissa Harlowe," which the vicar, to my great grief, impounded on being shown my purchase. A few days after the inquest, however, I was surprised to notice a certain prayer-book exposed here for sale, with the cover of which I seemed strangely familiar. To test my suspicions, I there and then entered the shop, acknowledged the proprietor, who stood bowing behind his counter, and requested a closer inspection of this special volume.

This rapidly opened disclosed on its fly-sheet the rough engraving of a rose, which I was not likely to forget. Having, therefore, converted my suspicion into certainty, I demanded, with some asperity, by what right this personal relic of the buried man had drifted into the window of Mr. Buttifant.

"Well, miss," explained the store-keeper, balancing himself nervously from one leg to

the other, "let the blame lie with those who brought it here. My duty is to buy and sell, and not to ferret out the history of trifles. A man does not like to lose his character for a matter of ninepence, especially with a growing family to depend upon him, and ninepence I allowed on this in a lot of sundries."

"Who brought you this lot?"

"I am just thinking, miss," from Caleb, evasively.

"Was it the sexton?" I demanded, rather brusquely; for I began to feel uncomfortable, and I had a strong antipathy to this official in our parish, who at least *looked* like a ghoul.

"Not exactly, miss," returned the shopkeeper, who was much too polite to contradict directly the vicar's daughter. "I know now, and it were our policeman's wife, and no actual coin passed between us; she made me set off this lot of hers against a bill of grocery, which long she had let it run, and part of it is running on to this day; so you see, miss, that when a man is kept so long

out of his money, and don't see it at last in colour, but in miscellaneous second-hands, the profit of such a deal is too small to bring any trouble to the shop."

"Are you aware," I continued, severely, "that this book was that stranger's property, on whom the inquiry sat not long ago at the Merlin?"

"So I should expect, miss," allowed the shopman, moistening his lips; "the body being friendless, its goods would go to the Crown; the police stand here for the Crown, so the police would come in natural for the perquisites. You see, Miss Richmond, that things have been done quite correct, after all. Mrs. Bridle acted within her legal right in disposing of this property. Bridle takes this article under the Crown, and she takes it under Bridle."

"She is a grasping woman!" I retorted, with flushing cheeks. "The whole transaction is a burning shame. Its paltriness does not in the least extenuate it. This book would have been placed in the coffin by any person

who possessed a grain of right feeling. This miserable traffic in the pillage of dead men reflects, I must say, Mr. Buttifant, very slender credit upon any of the parties concerned in the transaction. I will give you what price you please for this volume."

The proverb goes, that a dog will not cry out if you beat him with a bone; so I presume that the liberal offer of custom, with which I concluded, compensated Caleb Buttifant for the severity of my anterior strictures. Be this as it may, the store-keeper only smiled a feeble smile, and said I should have the prayer-book for half-a-crown.

"But you gave ninepence!" said I, turning upon him.

"I named the larger sum, miss," explained Caleb, with some presence of mind, "as there has been so much unpleasantness on the subject."

I did not see the argument, but I paid him there and then, without a murmur. My flashing eyes proclaimed my indignation, and I bounced out of the shop, carrying off my prize with me, without one word more.

So the relic became mine beyond contest. That was something. Home I brought in triumph my poor wanderer's prayer-book. Henceforward, this should repose in the safe seclusion of my desk; until—who knows?—some day, among the many days to be, a friend would come inquiring at our cottage doors for him who slept unnamed beneath the mound of grass. In my care the book should bide its time and opportunity. I would sedulously guard this sole existing link that connects one white face in its grave mould with the careless world of hurrying living creatures, who will not stay nor turn aside to own their dead. In the interim, let the great planets roll through their allotted spaces in immensity; let the cold faces of the stars look down upon that churchyard where he sleeps unknown, unnamed, and unlamented; let morning lighten into noon, and let noon fade into twilight; let summer wane away, and autumn reign among the changing woodlands; let the bitter wind arise full of dead leaves and rain and broken

branches; let year after year lie dead upon the threshold of eternity. The Ruler of time will decide whether the prayer-book will ever be wanted.

CHAPTER VI.

CUSTOMARY SUITS OF SOLEMN BLACK.

A FEW weeks after my purchase I was sitting with my father about dusk one summer evening, when, after a long pause and a preliminary cough, the vicar began—

“It is often curious to observe the connection which exists between matters wholly dissociated. For instance, no one would imagine that the poor fellow who perished on Stonesdale Ridge had been the indirect means of bringing to my local collection of land-shells one of the most interesting additions which it has of late years received.”

I told my father, laughingly, that he saw conchology in everything; that his ardour in pursuing these natural objects had begun

to verge upon monomania. But, if he would condescend to explain himself further, I might be in a better position to appreciate his remarks.

“The shell of the stonecutter snail,” pursued the vicar, in a didactive voice, “is most important from a structural point of view. That is not all; though by no means rare in many limestone districts, I had, up to a few weeks back, failed to observe this interesting creature within the limits of the parish of Redburn.”

“I congratulate you on your new parishioner,” I interposed, rather flippantly.

“The other morning,” my father resumed, ignoring my last interpolation, “when you burst in here, my love, with the tidings of your uncomfortable discovery, I confess that I was much exercised in mind to see the greater portion of my collection strewn upon our parlour floor. Still, as events have turned out, I have received some recompense for the interruption——”

“No allusion to my slight inconvenience

in losing my senses!" I retorted. "Oh, you hopeless old conchologist!"

"Well, dear, let that pass," smiled the vicar, "and listen how this discovery occurred. When we had found our poor friend up there, and were standing round rather helplessly in a ring, the doctor suggested that we should turn him over to his other side. This was no sooner done than I perceived a magnificent living specimen of the stone-cutter snail adhering to the lobe of the poor fellow's right ear; it——"

I stopped both mine at this point, and protested vehemently that my father must change the subject. Not one word more would I hear. If this was science, I felt deeply thankful that I knew nothing about it. The vicar observed, placidly, that I was nervous. I suggested, in retort, that it was better to be nervous than coldblooded. Finally, we both burst out laughing at our difference, and had hardly regained our composure, when I detected the crunching of no very elastic tread along the gravel path of our front

garden. A brisk peal upon our door bell startled us back to seriousness. It had, meantime, grown quite dark; the matches were nowhere to be found, and some visitor was clearly upon us.

The vicar sat up hurriedly and shook himself. He endeavoured to arrange his coat collar, which never would behave like any one else's. I began knocking things over in my search for a light. Meantime, I adjured my father, for the credit of the Church as by law established, to spare no efforts to smoothe his hair.

When I did illuminate the vicar and the rest of our apartment, I found him in such a ruffled state, that if he had gone to bed with his clothes on, I do not think the effect upon his appearance could have been more disheartening.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the vicar, feebly. "Who comes calling here in the name of wonder at owl-time?"

"Some one taken poorly in the parish," I hazarded.

"Mrs. Hammersley," said our parlour-maid, describing the nocturnal visitant as she introduced her. I think that my father said "Bother!" but I do not like to be quite sure.

We both rose; Mrs. Hammersley advancing effusively, had a hand for each of us at once.

"I have taken you both by surprise," she ejaculated, with her ringing laugh, which always set my teeth on edge, and jarred my nerves like a railway whistle; "I like running in upon people in a sudden, neighbour-like way. A surprise is so exhilarating."

The vicar said grimly that it was very delightful.

"Still it was so late," continued the visitor, drawing her gloves off and appropriating the best armchair, "when I passed your door, that I half said to myself, 'Mrs. Hammersley, you had better not disturb them now.'"

I begged our guest "not to mention it." A vague and convenient formula, which sounded civil and did not commit me to any excessive gladness at her nocturnal ingress.

"Never was a poor woman," Mrs. Ham-

mersley pursued, fanning herself with a handkerchief, "so worried and driven to death as I am. You find me, Mr. Vicar and Salvia, in the thick of parochial complications. Hammersley leaves so much to me. The Government Inspector is due at Stonesdale school very shortly! think of that; and not one of their Educational Department's most complicated forms has my unfortunate husband managed yet to fill in. He sits for hours staring at these schedules. He can't understand them. They remind him, he says, of Rosamond's maze at Woodstock. He wakes up in the night, asking himself Government questions. I really fear they may end by softening his brain. But that is not why I came. Have you heard the news, vicar? Now, you *must* have heard the news!"

"We seldom hear anything," said the vicar, masking a yawn; "and we get on none the worse for it. Ahem! Salvia, my dear, you had better——"

My father expressed himself elliptically, but to me his meaning was plain. So I

rose to discharge the rites of rural hospitality. To begin with, I unlocked our mahogany cheffonier, and placed before our visitor cake and wine. I may observe, in parenthesis, that I have never since found any cake equal to ours in the matter of crumbs. I may add, that of all items of furniture for shedding and loosening its component pieces of mahogany, our cheffonier easily bore away the palm.

So we pressed Mrs. Hammersley to feed; and after such show of reluctance as good breeding prescribes, she relented and "partook." I use the word which our visitor on this occasion herself selected.

"We have received no intelligence in particular," repeated the vicar, closing his eyes. (If he should drop off now and disgrace us all!)

"Ah!" murmured our visitor, conveying a sense of triumph and contempt in that monosyllable; "I thought not."

She finished her crummy cake leisurely. My father re-opened his eyes during the

pause, to my intense relief, and gave me a furtive look. By way of reply, I frowned at him rigorously. Mrs. Hammersley, munching on equably, alone broke the silence. I had not failed to supply Mrs. Hammersley with a plate, yet she preferred to spread a handkerchief on her knees, and, Heaven knows why, to consume her cake thereon. As a giant refreshed, she presently came up again to the conversational charge, and continued, with her utterance just slightly impeded by crumbs—

“First, the Priory people are going to shine again on their poor country neighbours. Sir Sidney arrives on Monday, her ladyship follows in a few days. But more remains. Now I dare say,” she added, with an abrupt diversion towards me, “that Miss Salvia finds the parish dull.”

I smiled at her suddenness, and nodded “Yes,” in a careless, self-satisfied way.

“It means to improve, I can tell you,” cried Mrs. Hammersley, with a nudge of her elbow, “since we may expect Mr. Richard

Leyland to reach the Priory at her ladyship's heels. They assure me that he has grown up a fine man and carries his clothes well. It will certainly enliven our lanes to have a handsome young fellow lounging about them. Though, for the matter of that, I dare say he has become too much of a fine gentleman to throw me a nod or to spare a word for my poor Lucy. Though many is the time that I have seen him washed in his nursery when quite an infant."

"I am confident that Mr. Richard Leyland will not notice *me*," I interposed, to divert further impending reminiscences.

"I sincerely hope not," said my father, absently.

"And why not, sir?" I demanded, snapping up my parent very tartly, and forgetting for an instant the presence of any third person.

"Because—because, my dear," faltered the vicar, "I do not exactly know what I meant to say—— So these are your great tidings, Mrs. Hammersley?"

"No, Mr. Richmond, they are *not*," replied that imperturbable lady, with quiet decision.

"Oh," said the vicar, again smothering a yawn; "excuse me; my thoughts were for the moment wandering. I hear the harvest prospects are good about Stonesdale. Have you relet your glebe yet, Mrs. Hammersley?"

But Mrs. Hammersley was not to be turned aside by glebe or harvest, or parish small talk to-day. She ignored the vicar's queries, and began to shake her head slowly and in silence. She was burning for us to begin to question her, but we prudently declined the pit-fall which she spread, and we remained as mute as she was. At last she could stand it no longer, and broke, rhetorically speaking, loose. "Such a piece of black cloth!" she exclaimed, without preface or explanation, rushing *in medias res*; "superfine, double-milled, and I should be sorry to say how much a yard——"

"I am glad to hear it," said the vicar, for Mrs. Hammersley clearly expected him to say something, and he was wholly at a loss.

"I could not afford the quality," she went on with a tone of ill-usage, "for my poor Lucy's back, and yet she needs a jacket sadly, when Charles Meadows takes her out. For these summer evenings are chilly, vicar, and it is useless pretending they are not."

"Do I quite follow you?" asked the vicar, humbly.

"Why, man, I saw the suits with my own eyes," continued the lady, indignantly, "half cut out they lay at the Stembury tailor's. It gave me a start when I heard that these suits were for the Priory stablemen to mourn in. Off I rushed to the hall, and there the housekeeper told me full particulars."

"For the stablemen to mourn in?" repeated my father, with a perplexed face.

"Down to the very helper," our visitor went on volubly. "No wonder, vicar, that you are surprised. I own to some astonishment myself, though I am the last person in the world to desire the obliteration of social landmarks. I put it to myself, 'Mrs. Hammersley, it is doubtless right, that the stable-

men of the great and wealthy should mourn—on occasions.’ That we are all agreed upon, and in this case it is very handsome of Sir Sidney to be deep in spite of past grievances. ‘But,’ I said, ‘if you had been consulted, Mrs. Hammersley, I think you would have drawn the line at the helper.’”

“Pardon me,” said the vicar, “if I can make nothing of all this.”

“Then you don’t believe a word of it?” exclaimed our visitor, querulously, raising her hands. “This is hard indeed! Have I not seen the tailor, have I not seen the—hem—trowsers? What proof, vicar, more conclusive, can you require?”

“No proof at all, ma’am,” returned my father, losing patience, “only a little plain English. What are you talking about? Who is dead at the Priory stables? For Heaven’s sake, explain yourself.”

“I am coming to that in good time,” returned Mrs. Hammersley, waving him off with severe composure. “Dead at the stables, indeed! Perhaps one of the horses,” she

ended by suggesting, bitterly and ironically.

"Mercy on us!" said my father, beneath his voice. "What is the woman driving at?"

I rushed in to my father's rescue, and only made things worse. "My dear Mrs. Hammersley," I interposed, blandly, "my father does not quite understand, whether the Redburn coachman or the Redburn helper has had a loss in his family. Now which is it?"

"Neither," returned our visitor, with great asperity. "If, my good girl, you or your father had paid the slightest attention to what I was saying—I suppose I speak Queen's English, and can clearly express myself—you would never have asked me a question so nonsensical. Pray, Mr. Vicar," turning rapidly on my father, "can you tell me what I was talking about?"

"To the best of my remembrance," hesitated the vicar, "you had seen at some Stembury tailor's the nether garments of one of the Redburn stablemen, which you thought—no.

the cloth of which you thought, might suit your daughter Lucy."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Hammersley, snappishly, with her face in a flame.

"Hand some more cake, Salvia," suggested my father, in desperation.

This sop to Cerberus was a failure. Mrs. Hammersley required no further refreshment.

"Let us change the subject," proposed the vicar, cheerfully; though what subject was to be changed neither he nor his daughter could guess. We only knew, that Mrs. Hammersley had got herself into such a "no-thoroughfare" of verbal confusion, that the only resource seemed to be to declare this last subject bankrupt and to begin conversation afresh on a new credit.

Seconding my father, I asked our visitor whether she had heard that Farmer Digweed was about to compete at the Leatherbarrow show for southdowns.

"All flesh is grass!" was our visitor's strange reply. She seemed in low spirits;

not really so, but conventionally, like an undertaker.

“You have heard bad news?” hazarded my father. “You have something, my dear madam, on your mind? Pray, proceed.”

Then our guest, brightening with the keen relish of a tragical announcement, seemed to draw herself up, and to swell larger and larger (this last was, of course, my fancy) through the darkening gloom in our little parlour. After shaking her head several times, she said in a voice worthy of Mrs. Siddons, “Yes, he is gone, poor fellow!” And then she said no more.

My father and I were too wary this time to commit ourselves, save in the vaguest generalities; so my father said, “Ah, indeed!” and I hazarded that “It might have been worse.”

“On that point,” retorted Mrs. Hammersley, oracularly, “there are two opinions.”

“And which side do you take?” said I, deferentially.

Our visitor now seemed inclined to treat

her topic historically. Therefore, with an abrupt transition of manner, she recommenced, "Ahem! Sir Sidney Leyland had two nephews—one a scamp, the other a credit. I believe, vicar, that I have so far expressed myself with clearness. Well——"

"Then Julian Leyland is dead?" interposed my father, hurriedly.

"Now, really, vicar," said Mrs. Hammersley, raising her finger, "it is far from polite to take the word out of a lady's lips. I have trudged a matter of three miles to carry you this intelligence, and these are my thanks—apathy first, and now interruption. But, since you have snapped me up, Julian Leyland *is* dead; and a good thing on all hands it seems allowed to be."

"Our best comment," said the vicar, "is silence. Poor Julian! A misspent life and an early grave!"

"I suppose," observed Mrs. Hammersley, with an ostentatious lowering of her voice, "that we may consider Richard Leyland as the heir now?"

"Surely, madam," returned the vicar, with chilling reproof, "any consideration at all on that point is as yet premature. Let us at least bury Julian Leyland before we speculate upon his successor."

"I defy you to do it!" exclaimed the dreadful woman, triumphantly.

"Mrs. Hammersley only means," I explained, with great suavity, "that Mr. Julian Leyland has been buried already."

"Not a bit of it!" she reiterated, fiercely; "not a bit of it!" We were both thunder-stricken. "Julian Leyland's grave," she pursued, with a wave of her arm, "is the ocean."

We were now really interested, and begged her to proceed.

"It appears," Mrs. Hammersley went on, refreshing her memory at intervals from a newspaper cutting, now produced from her pocket, "that the unfortunate deceased gentleman, before quitting his lodgings, partook freely of ser-imps" (I attempt to spell the insects as she pronounced them); "and bor-

rowed two superior Baden towels of the landlady; we have reason to believe that these were manufactured by our enterprising townsman—— ”

“Never mind that part!” cried the vicar, impatiently. “The shrimps and the towels are immaterial. Let us come to the catastrophe.”

“Read it, then, for yourself,” said the lady, in a pet, tossing the printed slip across; which my father accordingly did.

“Julian Leyland,” epitomized the vicar for my benefit, “seems to have been drowned while bathing on the Sussex coast, west of Brighton. The clothes were found by a coast-guard. The body has not been recovered.”

“Now you know it all,” said Mrs. Hammersley, glaring reproach.

“Indeed, we do,” I said, simply. “What an odd family these Leylands are!”

“My daughter means eccentric in their calamities,” corrected the vicar. “She does not intend to be unfeeling.”

“That, my dear,” explained Mrs. Ham-

mersley, condescendingly, "comes of their spirit. These old families are always spirited. Lord! I could tell you a dozen anecdotes about the Leyland spirit.'

The vicar looked frightened, and seemed to deprecate these proffered disclosures. "I believe," he interposed, quickly, "that Sir Sidney and his nephew had not spoken for years."

"Sir Sidney is mourning him," said the lady, "most handsomely now, at any rate. Sir Sidney is determined to do the right thing by the departed. A man of fine feelings, Sir Sidney, very!"

"And the servants are all put into 'black'?" I inquired.

"If I had been consulted," said our visitor, "I should, as I said before, have drawn the line at the helper. However, I was not. A stable-boy in sables indeed! What is the world coming to? Well, well, they will be all at church, vicar, as black as crows next Sunday. It will be a pretty sight!"

My father began to look grave. He

observed that to him the case suggested more serious aspects.

"I should think," proceeded Mrs. Hammersley, with happy inspiration, "that there ought to be some allusion in the sermon. The congregation might feel disappointed else, and the black liveries will need explaining."

"Of that," said the vicar, stiffly, "I crave leave to be the best judge."

"There are texts in plenty," she insisted, wholly unabashed; "I could help you to a dozen. There is that one, for instance, which says, 'They all ran violently down a steep place and were choked in the sea.' That would apply to the drowning."

The vicar made a stifled exclamation, and protested that the text would never do on many scores.

"Then get a better one yourself," returned Mrs. Hammersley, not bating an ace of her self-complacency; "I have no wish to argue the point; neither is it my business to provide texts for Redburn parish church. But

let me tell you, Mr. Vicar, that, take it as you please and how you please, Julian Leyland's death is a matter of the utmost moment, both at Redburn Priory and in Redburn parish. Julian might have been your patron in time—and well you know it. And now, when the poor fellow is washing about between Worthing and Rottingdean, you have not so much as a word of condolence to fling him in your sermon. Well, well, I say nothing.”

The vicar groaned.

“I think you misunderstand my father,” I protested, feebly.

“Let them ignore the dead,” pursued our visitor, with lofty emphasis. “We all turn our backs upon the setting sun. You'll have plenty of words for Richard Leyland, the rising sun. ‘The king is dead; long live the king!’”

“All this is wide of the mark, my good madam,” interposed the vicar, keeping his temper with difficulty; “Julian Leyland is dead under circumstances sufficiently tragical.

He lived in obscurity, married unwisely, and—is dead. *De mortuis*. I need not end the adage.”

“Unwisely!” echoed Mrs. Hammersley. “A paltry milliner girl! Unwisely!” (with sarcastic emphasis). “We might have had a mantua-maker rolling about our roads in the Leyland family coach, wearing the family diamonds at the county ball, lady-patronessing the local charities, teaching you and me our places, vicar! with the very needle-marks rough yet on her finger’s end! Pah! the ocean has taught her her place.”

The vicar faintly protested that all industry was honourable. This Mrs. Hammersley received with a sniff. In despair, as she showed no symptoms of going, I asked her, what manner of man in appearance the late Julian Leyland had been. ’Twas an aimless question; yet I wished to divert her from exasperating my father.

“I never set eyes on Julian Leyland,” Mrs. Hammersley with evident reluctance allowed. “Indeed, I have my doubts,” she

reflectively continued, "whether even his uncle knew him by sight. Probably not one of his mourners at the hall did. All this is singular, and does his uncle the more credit. This wretched girl, whom he married, kept him very much to herself, and to her circle—if a sempstress can be said to move or circulate among her class of friends. The couple must have lived on a crust and a carrot; poor as Job, vicar, they were. The needlewoman wife died before he did, they tell me. They have never good constitutions in that rank of life. Her survival might have occasioned difficulties. For instance, she would want a jointure. Who knows? These low-born girls will stand upon their rights, I can tell you. But as to Julian's looks or Julian's exploits—beyond knowing there was a Julian—the whole parish is profoundly ignorant. Take the Priory housekeeper——" Here the narrator, abruptly pausing, seemed to have begun some recipe from the cookery book of the celebrated Mrs. Glasse: "Take a fine young hare." "Pluck and truss a fat

spring chicken.”—“Take the Priory house-keeper,” she repeated. “She receives eight pounds and finds herself. The lower servants get five, and ample. ‘Mrs. Hammersley,’ she said to me, ‘I will be candid with you. There was a nephew, or I should not be now as deeply flounced as you see me. There was a nephew, or my lady would not come down here in the middle of the London season. There was a nephew, or Mr. Richard, hitherto unnoticed, would not be now invited for the first time; those are his sheets, Mrs. Hammersley, if I never speak another word. But beyond this, I am as ignorant as the child unborn.’” A pause, during which the clock in our church tower struck. That preserved us. Mrs. Hammersley started like the ghost in Hamlet. “It is getting late!” she observed, with the air of a new discovery, leisurely collecting her veil, gloves, and umbrella into a sheaf. We thought so too, but politeness precluded our assent. “I shall look in again in a day or two.”

This was very re-assuring, so I sent my

love to Lucy Hammersley by her departing mother, and hoped that Mr. Meadows was well.

“La! child,” exclaimed our visitor in the doorway, with the old objectionable ringing laugh, which seemed to shake the very gnats upon the window-pane; “they are much the same as ever—meandering about the lanes, and fixing the price of their furniture. One day Meadows’s living is to be in Cumberland, another at the Land’s End; at all times it is in Spain. Lucy has begun an antimacassar for an unbought armchair. I told Meadows to his head that, if Lucy could get any one better, she should not take him; but he only began to cry. As if crying would bring him a patron! What with Hammersley—who is not the man he was, and worse than ever at figures—and what with the parish, and these lovers, I am worn to a thread and fretted to a shadow. I have not a moment to myself; and I ought to have run away half an hour ago.”

After speaking this, I am thankful to say

“the thread and the shadow” rose, and, sweeping three books off the table with her flounces, trod heavily on our cat. In the passage, she pinned our small parlour-maid against the wall, like a passing brewer’s van. Indeed, every house which Mrs. Hammersley entered seemed three sizes too narrow for her. At last she shook and piloted herself out into the shadow of the poplars; and then the night took her, as somebody says in poetry, and a sensation of calm, deep and sweet, settled upon the vicarage. Yet she left my father so depressed by her harsh voice and silliness, that he was fit for little else but grumbling and bed-time. He utterly refused to re-open the subject of the baronet’s nephew. So when I had ascended to my aerial chamber, I tried to think it all over quietly. Living as I did in a world of phantoms, it was no slight event in my mental history to incorporate a new shadow into my spectral company. Henceforward, in many of my air-woven visions, the features of an imaginary Julian Leyland, stern and gloomy, enacted

various tragedies, illegalities, and oppressions; although I shrewdly suspect that my ideal Julian resembled more the fitful outlaw or the furious bandit of a transpontine theatre, than the actual man of repressed soul and narrow means, who had gone to the dogs in that quiet and undemonstrative way in which our heroes of the nineteenth century accept their final catastrophes.

CHAPTER VII.

RUPERT IVORY.

A GENIAL-LOOKING gentleman is picking his way along the sticky edge of a lane near Redburn. He assists himself by a thick, honest walking-stick. He is a burly, hulking, large-boned man. He wears a rough, good, unpretending overcoat, for the summer air carries this morning a spice of chill. We should guess his age at about forty-eight, for his side hair is tinged with intrusive dashes of grey. But his eyes are bright as a school-boy's, and each cheek is as fresh as a rose leaf. "What a good-natured, hearty, wholesome fellow!" would be a reader's exclamation, if he or she, during a morning stroll, were fortunate enough to encounter such a man.

“What a well-conditioned, light-hearted creature! His mere sight is absolutely good for the sore eyes of this restless self-analytical generation.” We turn, after we have passed him, to gloat upon his stalwart, lessening form, and mentally exclaim, “Behold, one at peace with himself and in amity complete with his fellow-creatures!” Consider also, how sensibly this man is dressed; how just a mean he steers between the overcare of the dandy, and the negligence of the sloven. His feet are shod with honest, thick-soled boots, his legs are cased in warm trowsers of Shetland wool. Yet, though rough in grain, the cut of his clothes is admirable. No rural scissors ever designed that nicely adjusted surtout, from beneath which, as he pauses for a second, he produces a chronometer watch, plain yet massive, which never left the maker’s shop under eighty golden guineas. In fact, this man is real and sterling as the day; in nature and unpresuming worth emphatically a gentleman. What a pity it is, that we do not actually know him, and that

he should only rise as some bright dream upon the pages of romance!

Then his nationality. Clearly he must be a Londoner, a denizen of our intellectual centre; yet what interest in the least details of our rural landscape irradiates his kindly eyes! He examines the very gate-posts of some fields which bound the lane; he is anxious to test their soundness, and shakes his head over a broken member of their five bars. It vexes his tender assiduity to observe the ruinous condition of a certain cottage pigsty. His comprehensive benevolence will not even pretermitt the welfare of brute swine.

What a hearty, soul-bracing "Good day to you!" he rings out upon two decrepid hinds; one old worm is holding his sides to cough, the other is tapping feebly with a bill-hook at the prostrate branches of an elm tree. Note how, when he perceives their occupation, the wave of welcome fades from the traveller's face into a ripple of annoyance. He is angry, kind soul! that the ruthless craft of the woodman should bereave the landscape of its

fair though inanimate ornaments. Trees are to this rich soul as children. A divine indignation, akin to the poet Cowper's when the axe slew his favourite poplars, impels our stranger to demand with flashing eyes of these two grey murderers of the grove—

“Who ordered this timber to be felled?”

To the shame of rural England be it spoken, that one old hind, straightening himself sleepily, had the audacity to reply in a drawl, low and monotonous, “And who be thee?”

The rudeness of an agricultural population is proverbial, so the questioner nobly restrained himself. Still, on public grounds, these bumpkins must be taught courteous ways, hence the traveller insists once again—

“My man, you will do well to answer instantly.”

“Go thy gait!” quavered the old woodman. “Who be thou, who speakest like the Ten Commandments?”

“One,” returned the stranger, with quiet, gentlemanlike firmness, “who has both the

right to question, and the means to compel you to reply."

The sense of which retort, proving too highly concentrated for either clownish apprehension, the two old idiots merely stared and grinned upon the indignant philanthropist.

"Well?" insisted the stranger, after a pause. "Out with it, you old skeleton!"

"Who felled thick there ellum?" repeated the woodman, lubricating each of his wrinkled palms.

"Ay, ay, my fine fellow!" said the gentleman, advancing a step nearer; "you know perfectly well what I mean; you will not put me off by these equivocations. Here I remain until I receive a civil answer and a clear one. The question is, who took upon himself to have this noble elm down?"

"The wind, master," chuckled the clown, with a complacent wink at his comrade. "You go and row he!"

Clearly this rough country fellow thought he had the best of this dialogue. The genial

stranger stood for a second biting his lip, and seemed, if virtue can be, disconcerted.

“You might have said so at once,” he rejoined presently, in a tone meeker and less buoyant. “Now, what should you value this elm’s bark at?”

“Half a pint of Adam’s ale,” said the workman, who had not previously spoken. “That is, it ban’t worth nothing at all.”

Clearly these fellows were hopeless. The benevolent person shrugged his shoulders, and pursued his journey. “I made sure,” he muttered to himself, as he stepped out lustily, “that the baronet had begun to demolish the timber. It is a relief to find that this was a mare’s nest.”

Presently, he met a little schoolgirl trotting merrily home to her dinner. The child presented the prettiest bit of rural colouring—flaxen poll, hare-bell eyes, and a tiny cloak of hunter’s red. This pleasing sight seemed to restore that perfect equilibrium of self-complacency to our good friend, which the insolence of these woodcutters had in some

trifling sense disorganized. He brightened instantly, exclaiming—

“Good morning, little Sally! Here is a penny-piece, for the good which your blue eyes have done me.”

The provisional Sarah curtsied, pocketed the donation, and suggested, “Amelia Elizabeth.”

“God bless you, my dear!” returned the worthy man, patting the girl’s head. “Bless you, whatever your name is. Trip home, little sunbeam, and tell your mother from me to give you some pudding.”

The stranger pursued his way, and the cottage maiden ran happily to her home, full of the good gentleman’s urbanity. How magical is the influence of kindness! To our traveller the way grew worse as he advanced into the inner core of parochial Redburn. It seemed hard to believe that civilized England, in the present year of grace, could produce such gelatinous thoroughfares. But a contented mind is not quenched by pulpy adhesions which broaden

boots into snow-shoes. So on he swung, and beguiled the heavy road by carolling an honest English song about a bowl and a friend to share it. See how the man's unselfish nature, even in chance warblings, will assert itself! Once again he stayed his course to harangue a squat youth, who was cudgelling a recalcitrant donkey—a pair, engaged in diffusing shrimps, bloaters, and squares of salt among our inland population.

A furlong further on the stranger paused once more to chat with an ancient stone-breaker, whom he patronized to such an extent that this futile rustic greeted his departure with tears of relief and gratitude. Another son of toil, also a mender of ways, he talked into a different and somewhat mutinous frame of mind; for he assured this drudge of his (the philanthropist's) regret that any Briton should receive so low a rate of wages. Had this matter rested with him, the lover of humanity, the weekly receipts of the stone-breaker would have been assuredly doubled. But since this affair lay

beyond the province and control of any private individual, our stranger must leave the labourer with his benediction, and, we may add, with a discontented heart.

With many such touching episodes did the progress of this admirable personage continue, until the stately iron gates of Redburn Priory impeded his further advance. On stating here to a many-wrinkled portress that he was bound upon business with Sir Sidney Leyland, these barriers were withdrawn. The traveller strolled into the park with almost a step of ownership, so elastic is the tread of conscious rectitude. Thence, passing onwards towards the house between a double avenue of umbrageous chestnuts, the good man's face seemed to flush with pleasurable emotion. His interest in every feature of the landscape at this point redoubled. With the eye of a connoisseur he paused to inspect the feeding herds of fallow deer. He endeavoured playfully to grasp the bole of an enormous oak tree, and sportively appraised to himself the giant of the grove at over a

fifty-pound note. A sudden bend in the approach presented to his view the north elevation of Redburn Priory. This first sight of this architectural masterpiece, designed by Inigo Jones, afforded him the liveliest visual satisfaction. He rubbed his hands, and nearly skipped in the plenitude of his childlike delight. Soon dismissing this excitement for his more habitual cheerfulness, he advanced with firmer footstep, like Tennyson's "Lord of Burleigh," until he stood beneath the sculptured porch of the front entrance. Above his head he saw, in armorial stone, the bloody hand on the escutcheon and the crest of the merlin above the shield.

"Ha! you're a pretty bird!" said the stranger, glancing up with his fingers on the handle of the hall bell; "but I fancy that the family hawk will not fly quite so high after my visit."

Having thus spoken, our excellent friend tugged such a cheery and imperative summons upon the iron tongue of the bell that

Sir Sidney Leyland's under-footman, boozing in the servants' hall, paused in the act of raising a tankard of ale to his lips, and struggled into his epauleted coat, believing that either the lord-lieutenant or his Satanic Majesty had arrived in person.

On this fluttered acolyte the genial pedestrian drew a spacious and highly glazed visiting card, and would thank the servant to carry it without delay to Sir Sydney's own immediate hands. This request was obeyed with respectful alacrity; the domestic read the card as he went, and we shall venture to follow his example. Amid many flourishes, we find the name of one "Rupert Ivory" engraved—a name surely worth remembering; one likely to occur upon the subscription lists of hospitals; a sound of succour to the broken and the bankrupt; a beacon of hope to the widow and the orphan. Let the reader make a mental note of the name, in case evil days also come upon him.

Meantime the servant had returned to say that Sir Sidney knew nothing whatever

about Mr. Rupert Ivory; would the owner of the card be, therefore, good enough to state his business?

It is disheartening to reflect that a reception so chilling should have awaited a visitor so exemplary. Mr. Ivory, so let us call him now, received the message with some quiet amusement. His lips parted in a smile, which meant a good deal. It compassionated in its forbearance the baronet's uncordial obtuseness; it lamented in its expression the blindness of the great; it suggested an almost angelic amount of self-restraint. Indeed, had an actual angel called on foot at the Priory, the baronet would not have granted him an interview without some previous statement of what his visitor required. Here was a man waiting on the outer door-step of a country seat, who ought to be cherished in the inmost hearth of a palace. Never mind; the tables would soon be turned; meantime patience! So Rupert Ivory tore a blank sheet out of his pocket-book, and wrote—

“Mr. Rupert Ivory, on business connected with the late Mr. Julian Leyland.”

“There! We knew it,” exclaims the reader. “From this brief scrawl the light of kind deeds shines out apparent. Here is the Good Samaritan, in modern garb; some mentor of the late unhappy Julian; one whose benevolence has soothed the last aimless years of the baronet’s scapegrace nephew; one whose good advice was always ready, but usually ineffectual. Possibly, this exemplary friend comes hither bearing to the bereaved uncle petitions of forgiveness from the lips that now are silent. Rupert Ivory, in the name of human nature generally, we are proud of you.”

Be the reader’s estimate right or wrong, the effect of Mr. Ivory’s scrap of pencilled paper upon the baronet is electrical. Virtue triumphant, bearing a thick stick, and in a rough overcoat, is ushered obsequiously along picture-hung passages into the inner sanctum of the baronet.

Sir Sidney had just completed a note, and

would Mr. Ivory be seated for a moment while this document was sealed and despatched? Mr. Ivory would find the London evening paper of last night upon that end of the table. The visitor did not read the news, but employed himself to better advantage by taking silent stock of the apartment and its owner.

As regards the latter, we may do the same. Sir Sidney Leyland could hardly yet be called an elderly gentleman, though his actual years might have warranted such an appellation. Many of his contemporaries were so described, and would so describe themselves contentedly enough. But Sir Sidney carried his years with a jaunty air and an upright bearing. Neither had Sir Sidney the slightest intention of growing old a single hour before it was necessary to accept our final and inevitable decrepitude. Take him as he stood, after his normally careful toilet, and without scrutinizing too nearly to what extent he was "made up," the baronet was a person of notable appear-

ance, and of a goodly presence. He still retained, with some slight aid from his tailor, the light and well-turned figure of his younger days. His features were thin and regular, his nose and lips were fine and sharply chiselled. His hair was almost too raven in its blackness to be wholly beyond suspicion; a tinge of greyness here and there would have seemed more natural—yet no silver threads appeared. It was still thick enough to admit of its being arranged into a number of artistically careless ringlets, whereby the balder portions of the head were veiled with a sedulous dexterity. So out of full daylight or across the room, the baronet still wore extremely well, and looked the high-bred, fine gentleman, every inch of him; a being sent into the world neither to toil nor to spin; one who was to have his own way through life, to feed well, amuse himself, keep up an outside varnish of high breeding, and oblige creation generally by consuming the fat of the land and looking handsome.

Of his hands especially Sir Sidney

land was extremely proud. In his picture, which hung over the plate and racing-cups in the grand dining-room, a good deal had been made of the slender symmetry and taper whiteness of the fingers. The baronet's taste was too good to bedizen them with rings, and he wore only two very good ones. But sitting, speaking, or moving, the hands were always *en evidence*. Age had not touched them; they might have been the property of a young dandy of eighteen; somehow or other, they seemed *cruel* hands.

Sir Sidney sealed his letter and glanced up; carelessly at first, but his scrutiny of his guest ended by settling into a very narrow inspection.

"You tell me here," he began, raising the torn-out leaf of the pocket-book, "that I am honoured with this interview in my capacity of the late Mr. Julian Leyland's uncle?"

It is useless to disguise the fact that Rupert Ivory, though entrenched in a citadel of inward virtue, was somewhat discomposed and awkward under the influence of the

baronet's handsome looks and chilling airy courtesy. Ivory had expected to have found a man more of Julian's type in Julian's uncle. He now told himself that this expectation had been unreasonable. In vain did Ivory endeavour to set himself more at ease by the reminder, drawn from an extensive series of dealings with every gradation of fine gentleman, real and spurious, that when the outer surface of a man was so imposing and elaborated, there could not fail to be a pretty numerous crop of follies and foibles which a longer acquaintance would soon divulge. Still, for the moment, knowing all this, Rupert Ivory could not for his life help feeling considerably insignificant, and as yet unable to assert himself in the baronet's presence.

"Let me offer first my respectful condolences to that uncle," said Ivory, bending forward.

"They are unnecessary. My nephew and I had not spoken for years," replied Sir Sidney, with a shrug of his well-made shoulders.

This would never do. Ivory must make a desperate effort to recover his quenched buoyancy. Let him oppose a genial and easy vein to this man's ceremonious iciness, and carry him by a storm of good-fellowship. "You have a nice place here, Sir Sidney Leyland, Baronet; what avenues! what architectural effects! what a truly baronial residence!"

The baronet slightly raised his eyebrows, and looked Mr. Ivory hard in the face; but he merely said, "Shall we confine ourselves to the matter in hand? My time is valuable. I presume you are not come to discuss architecture?"

"As you will," said Ivory, putting a good face on the rebuff; "business by all means. Only as an impulsive kind of fellow, a prey to excessive animal spirits, as a Londoner not so often out upon a country holiday as to have become indifferent to Nature—on all these accounts, I wished to thank you, Sir Sidney, for the good which the mere sight of your feeding fallow-deer and ancestral oaks have done me."

"You are very kind," said the baronet, drily; "let us proceed to business. Say what you have come to say. I have many letters to despatch."

"At your desire, Sir Sidney, I will," said Ivory, with a disconsolate bow. "I am a blunt fellow and an enthusiast; if my admiration has been too abrupt, pardon it. I will repress myself better in future. Let us return to Mr. Julian Leyland."

"It would be as well," said Sir Sidney, with studied politeness. "I can only give you a quarter of an hour."

"Your late nephew," commenced Ivory, approaching his awkward subject with a counterfeited ease of gesture and attitude, "was at the close of his life over head and ears in debt——"

"For no penny of which I am legally responsible."

"Hear me out, Sir Sidney, and then judge if I wish so to hold you. Well, this young fellow applies to me."

"Then I may assume now, Mr. Ivory, that you are, as I supposed, a money-lender?"

"Allow me to explain," said Rupert Ivory, coughing in a modest way behind his palm; "though I certainly assist my fellow-men with occasional advances, I am no money-lender in your sense, Sir Sidney. Under Providence, I happen to possess a good deal of unemployed capital. Consequently, it is my hobby, when I find an interesting case and fair security, to do what I can for him."

"And you found my nephew interesting?" put in the baronet, with a sneer.

"Eminently so," continued the visitor, ignoring the covert irony of the interruption. "I have a weakness for good family. I am not of good family myself; but pedigree in difficulties always commands my warmest sympathy. In fine, between myself and your lamented nephew an important transaction ensued. The affair was conducted and completed with the utmost pleasantness on both sides."

"What is the amount?" inquired Sir Sidney, curtly.

"There is no amount," returned Ivory,

with his eyes on the ground. "Your nephew did not die in my debt; having something to sell, I gave him money's worth for this something. I purchased at a great risk to myself. I invested eight thousand golden pounds upon what, as far as my own life is concerned, may prove an empty shadow. But I have a dear boy at school, who may one day have cause to bless the industry of a devoted father. The reversion to these estates is mine."

The baronet rose with a smothered imprecation, and, turning his back on Ivory, strode to the fireplace, and leant against it for some moments. "Then Satchell's forebodings are verified!" he growled between his teeth. "I never thought this milksop could muster pluck to do it."

Ivory, the Benevolent, watched him with twinkling eyes. He had drawn blood at last from this surface of ice and marble arrogance.

All at once Sir Sidney faced round, with an evil light in those fine eyes of his, and came forwards. "So you have the audacity, Mr.

Money-lender, to announce this nefarious transaction in person? There is the door. Be off, you scoundrel!"

"Sir Sidney, Sir Sidney," expostulated Ivory, retreating behind the table, "my constant maxim is to do business pleasantly. I am not subject to irritation; I excuse the emphasis of an afflicted uncle; I am a sociable, gregarious, humanity-loving individual. Do hear me out."

"Well, go on," cried the baronet, throwing himself sullenly down in his chair. "I give you five minutes more."

"I have purchased—ahem—the reversion to the Redburn estates, subject——"

"To the trifling impediment of my life. Get on, you rascal!"

"Now really," reasoned Ivory, in deeply injured accents, "this is neither a hearty way of doing business, nor yet a good-humoured one. If you had been my late client's father, I could scarcely excuse the term. Consider my feelings. Do not rashly vituperate commercial industry. I come here out of pure

comity to yourself. I might have kept all this dark; other gentlemen in my profession would have done so. Suppose I had held my tongue, until—well, how shall we put it delicately and pleasantly?—until you, my dear sir, had left us—I am sure that I never saw so hale a gentleman—had left us, universally respected, and not likely to be easily replaced.”

“Finish and begone!” interposed the baronet, anything but propitiated by this graceful reference to his latter end.

“I have just done,” replied Ivory, with the buoyancy of a man beneath a blanket; “but a motive is a motive, and every Briton has the right of reply; and mine is, that I shook my head at any idea of keeping these matters close, when the daily prints announced to me your nephew’s lamentable demise. ‘No,’ I exclaimed, ‘let others burrow and worm; at least, Rupert Ivory will be Anglo-Saxon and aboveboard. This will I do, and fear no misconstruction. I intend, in a pleasant sort of way, to run

down and cast an eye over the place. I shall, in politeness bound, send in my card to the tenant for life, if in residence. Should he grant me an interview, I will condole with him upon his recent bereavement; and proceed to explain—in a pleasant, hearty kind of confidence—the exact nature of my connection with this property.’ ”

Having thus spoken, Rupert Ivory began backing towards the door with profuse inclinations of his spine in the direction of the baronet. A gesture, however, from Sir Sidney arrested his departure.

“Where is the deed?” demanded the master of the house. “I suppose this sale was managed by an instrument of some sort. Have you brought the thing with you?”

“The original is in town,” returned the money-lender with respectful alacrity, producing a document; “but this correct copy is quite at your service. Indeed, it is intended for your hands. Your lawyer may see the original at my office any day, but, as a rule, I avoid taking originals out with

me. They might in this lonely part of the country get mislaid. Good day, Sir Sidney."

"One moment, Mr. Ivory," answered the baronet, with manifest reluctance. "May I inquire if you are open to an offer for your bargain? I need hardly remind you that our law courts regard such transactions with needy heirs more than suspiciously."

"I shall run my chance of that," returned Conscious Benevolence; "on the whole, I think that I mean to retain my investment. A son, now a happy boarder at a seminary in which I feel every confidence, enjoys field sports. We shall chase the deer together in years to come; or, if a doting parent be then beneath the verdant sward, my son shall chase the deer alone; bless him!"

"Your ideas of sport, Mr. Ivory, are, to say the least, peculiar."

"They may be unconventional," responded the money-lender. "I am unconventional myself. The healthy exercise, the noble woods, the fresh breeze that mantles the

cheek—these are the zest of my amusements.

“You will succeed in amusing not merely yourself, but the whole neighbourhood, if you carry these hunting projects into execution. For the present, our interview must end; for the future, I refer you to my solicitor. If Equity can upset this transaction, Mr. Ivory, rest assured I shall spend my last sixpence in its overthrow.”

“I have no fear of an appeal to the law,” returned his visitor; “the best conveyancing talent in the kingdom has drawn the deed by which the late Mr. Julian sold me, in reversion, the fee of this estate. It is right and tight. I spared no expense in its drafting. If your lawyer can drive a coach and horses through that, he deserves to be made Lord Chancellor!”

“All this,” said the baronet, with a lofty and affected carelessness, “is my lawyer’s province. With you I must decline to discuss the case further. Let this, I beg, be our last personal meeting. That is my

lawyer's address: Mr. Satchell, of the firm of Dubbin, Rust, and Satchell, Gray's Inn Square. He will, I need not say, go narrowly into the justice of your claim. Let me hear from you henceforth only through the channel of his office."

"Pardon me," said Ivory, not quite so obsequiously, "but that cannot—with every wish to oblige you—well be. I am a neighbour—a humble neighbour, it is true—of Sir Sidney Leyland's already. In fact, I have just signed the lease of Tamerton Cottage, and at present rent some thirty acres of land at no great distance from your property. I believe Tamerton is some forty minutes' drive from here—you can correct me. I shall walk on there when our present interview has terminated. The journey on foot will occupy some hour and a half. During this I can leisurely form my first impressions of the landscape and the rustics. I wish, moreover, to arrive at my new residence quietly and without parade, as a pedestrian, and without the clatter of equipages. I shall

inspect the capabilities of the place; and if I find matters satisfactory—I am not a luxurious individual—I shall bring down my horses and household without delay. I should wish my son to spend his next midsummer holidays in acquiring the pursuits of a young English country gentleman.”

Sir Sidney listened in blank dismay, This intelligence was both unexpected and appalling. A seldom-seen Shylock in the heart of the City, with a claim upon the property, was bad enough. But Shylock settled at his elbow, meeting him at every turn; Shylock in gaiters, with a spud, trying to ruralize; this was unendurable. Could he buy the fellow out? Could he have him prosecuted? Could he wipe him off the face of the earth? Alas! these were idle dreams. This was the law-fearing nineteenth century. A Leyland, even upon his own hearthstone, must tolerate the insolences of a money-lender! Gone were the privileges of Sir Sidney's order; the letters of the seal, the right of the gibbet—gone!

"I fear," continued the money-lender, with mock humility, keenly luxuriating in the other's aspect of disgust, "that, living in one neighbourhood, we cannot well avoid meeting occasionally in the future. But I know my place, Sir Sidney; and I do not, of course, regard our business interview of to-day as establishing any social acquaintanceship between us. I shall leave it to you, Sir Sidney, to recognize me or not, as you please, the next time we meet in the county roads or at county gatherings."

Sir Sidney listened mechanically. It seemed like a hideous nightmare, having this fellow for ever in the way at the very centre of his local importance. Wherever money could get him in, Ivory would be sure to push and force for himself admission. At every agricultural dinner there would be Ivory, like a death's head, dulling the joys of the banquet. At every flower-show there would be Ivory, like a thorn in his side, professing to admire the cottage dahlias. At every public meeting Ivory would attend, and move aimless resolu-

tions, to glorify and advertise himself. The neighbours were all so easy and uncritical, that if Ivory asked them to dinner, why to dine with him they would go, and be hand and glove with him in a fortnight. As a climax of foreboding, Ivory might (forbid it, Heaven!), in the remote future and in the excitement of a contested election, be dubbed a magistrate! And this fellow held the reversion to Sir Sidney's house and lands! And there he would be, living at his side, watching like a hungry heir for the dropping in of his possession. Could Satchell only be there to advise him? The purchase of the reversion could not be a bubble, for the fellow had shown his hand before there was any legal necessity for his doing so. Ivory had, moreover, taken the lease of Tamerton Cottage, clearly to watch his investment. Lastly, Satchell had found among Julian's correspondence hints that such a sale had been contemplated by the dead man. No, Sir Sidney could not but believe that Ivory spoke the truth. This fellow, was, then both

powerful and dangerous. He must be either swept from his path or conciliated. Which? How swept from his path? debated Sir Sidney to himself. He glanced up at the stern and sinister features of Sir Raymond Leyland, as Vandyck had painted him, and a story flashed across his descendant's mind, how Sir Raymond had served a certain Roundhead scrivener who had once molested him; and how the courtly Stuart on the throne granted Sir Raymond his full royal pardon; and how the scrivener's widow sat howling and rending her hair to no purpose at his gates, as Sir Raymond, and a train of ruffling gallants at his heels, rode airily out a-hunting; and how the widow cursed him, but that Sir Raymond never seemed a whit the worse for it, but died like a hero at Worcester field, just before the bad days, and just when he was getting past the pleasures of life.

All these reflections crowded on Sir Sidney in an instant of time. He was a Leyland still, as haughty, as vindictive, as un-

scrupulous as yonder old cavalier frowning from the canvas. Alas for thee, my genial Ivory, had thy call been made a trifle of two hundred years earlier! Alas for thee, my Ivory, had even in this year of grace, in which thou art bearding a Leyland in his castle, royal pardons been as easily obtainable or as graciously dispensed, as when grim Raymond spitted the crop-eared scribe not twenty yards from where thou art now standing! (The housekeeper, when pressed, will show the stain to visitors.) But alas! these degenerate days, O my Ivory, allow thee to stand there and bluster and take no wrong. And a British jury will pay thee handsomely for every kick which may chance to light upon thy commercial carcase. And an enlightened press will overwhelm thy kicker with ridicule and vituperation. Let us thank God for laws which protect impudence so well as those of this glorious country! All this occurred to Sir Sidney, and decided him how to act. Ivory could not be crushed, therefore Ivory must be conciliated. And

whereas Sir Raymond would have continued the conversation somewhat to this effect : "Hound of a scrivener, take that !" and then the flash of a rapier, a heavy thud, and the penman, face upwards, would have supplied a stage direction to the sentence. Tableau : Sir Raymond grimly wiping his blade, while a housemaid of the period is brought into requisition, with copious pails of soap and water, to preserve the polish of the oaken floor. Thus would it have been in the days of the Stuarts. As it was, Sir Sidney's more modern continuation of an analogous affront was an anticlimax both tame and unromantic. Sir Sidney Leyland merely begged his scrivener, in the person of Mr. Ivory, to take—a chair !

After glooming upon the money-lender for some moments, he resumed with an effort, "Ah, yes ! Tamerton Cottage. I remember now seeing, as I rode past, a bill up."

"The bill was taken down," said Ivory, "yesterday."

"I knew the last tenant, slightly. He

found it damp, I believe—infernally damp. You hold your lease, I presume, under Mrs. Atherton ?”

Ivory rather liked damp in moderation ; and said he did hold of that lady.

“ And all is sealed, signed, and arranged ? ”

Ivory bowed in reply.

Some hasty idea had occurred to the baronet of out-bidding Ivory for Tamerton Cottage, if only to keep the usurer at greater arm's length.

After a pause, Sir Sidney proceeded, “ I am sorry to hear this, Mr. Ivory. You have forced yourself into my neighbourhood. Some collision between us is in the future inevitable, as things are.”

“ There need be none, Sir Sidney, with delicacy and forbearance on both sides.”

“ Your motive in taking Tamerton Cottage is clear.”

“ The house was to let. I could pay the stipulated rent, and I gave references of my future solvency. I break no law of England by leasing Tamerton.

"That is not to the point," returned Sir Sidney, with asperity. "You may plant yourself in the middle of the turnpike road, and watch my lodge-gate from dawn to sunset. You have a right, I suppose, to be there, but you come as a spy or a detective all the same."

Ivory was really much hurt at such a comparison.

"I have one most vital question to ask," the baronet went on, looking very grim. "As it seems you mean to elbow me at every turn in my life and occupations down here, have the goodness to inform me, whether you intend to publish yourself, right and left, as the purchaser of the reversion to my property?"

"At your request, Sir Sidney, I will not breathe the transaction to one of your Blankshire neighbours."

"You distort my words, Mr. Ivory; I made no request; I merely asked a question. Is it likely, in our present relations, that I should condescend to ask a favour of *you*?"

"You are not very conciliating, Sir Sidney."

"Answer my previous question, sir; or, if you will not answer it, kindly take your leave."

"Hear me out," entreated Ivory, in an injured voice. "The matter rests thus. My policy is frankness, and always has been. Sir Sidney, you shall look behind the cards I hold, and see where I am weak and where I am strong. To premise, there is a general, although undeserved, prejudice in county circles against gentlemen of my profession. I consider this a frank and handsome admission."

Sir Sidney smiled sarcastically, and waved the other to proceed.

"Now with the mass of folks down here, I should really gain in social importance by being known as the future possessor of Redburn; no matter how I came by that possession. But, with a few of the leading families the disclosure of my business relations to this property, would involve me in pre-

judice and distrust. Now, I am in politics a staunch Conservative, and a great admirer of the aristocracy. I support our system of landed property. I revere our State Church. Consequently, I prefer the esteem of your few leading families to the coarser adulation of the herd. Therefore, if you please, Sir Sidney, not a soul in Blankshire, save you and I, need know I have bought Redburn over your head. By the time, Sir Sidney—I trust a very distant one, when—ahem—you have ceased to adorn the neighbourhood and your position, I shall be thoroughly localized in this vicinity, and—the boast is an honest one—I am convinced, universally esteemed. I can then—ahem—take possession without fear of any detrimental reflections. My good neighbours will have learnt by that time to separate the man from his calling, and will respect me for my personal character.”

“And that is your programme?” said Sir Sidney, looking somewhat relieved in spite of himself.

“I might be compelled,” supplemented

Ivory, drawing circles on the carpet with his walking-stick, "to throw off the veil, in case you were to cut down timber, or if you, as the lawyers phrase it, committed waste to any extent upon the property. But a gentleman of your taste and tact is not likely to injure the landscape, or to appear as a devastator of the soil. But in case, let us say, your agent did commit waste or fell, I should have to appear in the courts of law under my reversionary character, a necessity which I should greatly lament."

"I thank you for the hint, at any rate," returned Sir Sidney, loftily. "And now, I think, Mr. Ivory——"

"I am going this instant, Sir Sidney," and the money-lender began to collect his notes and documents.

Enter a footman, to announce the arrival of Mr. Richard Leyland, from London.

Sir Sidney looked annoyed at the *contre-temps*; but he would see Mr. Richard in five minutes. Let him be shown in to her ladyship. Ivory had pricked up his ears keenly

enough at this announcement, and now he stood hesitatingly near the door.

"You wish to say something," said Sir Sidney, coldly, "and I guess its nature. Speak it out."

"This young man," stammered Ivory, twisting his glove about, "ought to be warned that, since the resettlement of Redburn by your brother and yourself, he has had no kind of future interest in the property."

"That is unnecessary," said the baronet, with decision. "Richard expects nothing."

"At his age," suggested Ivory, with a crafty nod towards the door in the supposed direction of Richard Leyland, "the women put these kind of notions into young gentlemen's heads. There is not a mother down here with daughters to marry, who will not believe this young fellow is your heir; ay, and tell him so, for the matter of that."

"The worse for him if he believes them," concluded the baronet, bitterly; and, as he showed no signs of saying more, Mr. Ivory bowed, and went his way.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITHOUT AN INTRODUCTION.

“WELL, Mr. Vicar,” said I to my father, a few mornings after the incursion of Mrs. Hammersley, “why don’t you go forth and aggravate your parishioners?”

“Because, my love,” replied Mr. Richmond, “there happens to be a lull on this special forenoon in parish business and in parish ailments.”

“Then, I conclude, you are going to sleep, Mr. Vicar?”

“On the contrary, Miss Richmond, I have had an idea.”

“On what subject?”

“The stonecutter snail.”

"I do not relish the topic, but what has this beast done now, father?"

"I may, Salvia, have unduly extended the geographical distribution of that species; at least, as I lay awake last night, a dreadful suspicion to this effect crossed my mind. Now, in science it is far better to hold one's tongue than to record an error. To register a fact which the recorder is not certain of, is about the most mischievous thing which a student of nature can do."

"Then leave the stonecutting brute alone, Mr. Vicar, and say nothing about him."

"No, my love, that would be slovenly. The right course is to investigate further. I shall now ascend Stonesdale Ridge for that purpose. Ten to one, if the species be native in my parish, a careful search over the same ground for, say a couple of hours, will reveal some other individuals. If the species be a casual here——"

"How could it be, papa?"

"In this way. I never saw this kind about here before; a suspicious fact, to com-

mence with. Then, how is the species ultimately detected? Attached to our poor friend——”

“Really, papa, I wonder at you!”

“Excuse me, my dear, but I must further explain myself. Imprimis, our friend came from a long distance, and perished of exhaustion; *ergo*, he must have rested in a sitting position several times at spots far removed, before he sank down to rise no more. During one of these intervals of repose, the little creature may have crawled into his pocket, and so been transplanted, when the voyager went on, many miles beyond its natural limits of distribution. Be this as it may, the point is full of interest, and demands a searching scrutiny. So, as Sally Webb is again at her washing-tub, and as old Bagster does not require to be read to this morning, what say you, Salvia, to a walk together up Stonesdale Ridge?”

“Papa,” I replied, with a slight shiver, “I have taken a horror to the place since——
Indeed, let us go in some other direction.”

“No other spot,” answered the vicar, obstinately, “can settle the question about the stonecutter; and these nervous fits are only fit for a boarding-school miss. Here is a good opportunity for you to break the spell. It will be better than going alone. Why should one sad but natural occurrence keep you from your favourite mountain walk? Now, take this very vicarage, and consider how many persons, my predecessors, their wives, children, servants, must have died in it already. Yet you would not sleep out in the field on this account, or build a new parsonage. Dead men and graves, alas! are common everywhere.”

“I see that I am absurd, father, so I will come with you.”

Thus it was settled; and up we went. I must here premise that, when out upon a “snailing” expedition, my father always wore half a dozen small cotton bags tied to his coat-buttons, in which to deposit his treasures. These were my own manufacture, and they answered admirably the purpose

for which they were intended. Now, as the vicar meant clearly to potter about a good deal upon the summit in search for his favourites, and as the hue and cry after the "casual" did not interest me very deeply, I tucked my Ossian under my arm, and then felt secure in my own resources to amuse myself.

We made the ascent leisurely, the vicar stopping here and there to increase the inmates of his collecting-bags. At my half-way house I said, half in jest and half seriously—

"I hope I shall not find another man up there this morning."

"You should add," said the vicar, dropping his pocket lens, "that you fear finding another *dead* man. I suppose that a living specimen of our race would not be equally objectionable?"

"Yes, it would," I rejoined snappishly; "for a live shepherd is as dull as a dead schoolmaster; and only shepherds ever come up here."

“We shall see, Miss Salvia.”

“We shall, Sir Oracle.”

We got up at last, and then crossed to the actual cairn erected by the Scotch cobbler. I had never seen this before, and now that I had conquered the first dislike to coming here, the place seemed the very reverse of terrible, and began to possess a strange sort of fascination for me. I began by pretending to help my father in his search at this point for another “stonecutter”; but, as I soon wearied, and only displayed my ignorance by gathering the most common of down snails, I presently retired to the cairn and produced my Ossian; while the vicar wandered on, till I could just catch his head, sinking and rising at intervals behind a distant shoulder of the eminence. I had read for twenty minutes, or even half an hour, when I was startled out of my seven senses by hearing behind me a step much more elastic than the vicar of Redburn’s. Glancing round in utter astonishment from where I sat perched upon the cairn, I perceived a young man within

thirty yards, coming straight towards me. He had evidently made me out long before I had perceived his approach, and I saw by his gait that he intended to speak to me. I was in a considerable flutter, as may be imagined, at the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with an utter stranger on Stonesdale Ridge. To make things worse, my provoking old father had strayed by that time quite out of sight. What should I do? I felt almost inclined to run away in the vicar's probable direction, leaving my guns, under the form of a parasol and Ossian, in the possession of the advancing enemy.

In another instant I might have raced off helter-skelter, had not one of my father's small snail-bags in the young stranger's hand attracted my attention. That explained the coming of this gentleman—for gentleman I saw he was—in my direction. I knew of old how continually these items of the vicar's conchological equipment were mislaid, how eternally they became detached. I now felt not a little out of patience with their unme-

thodical possessor. Why should his carelessness expose me to the awkwardness of this impending explanation with a perfect stranger? I registered a vow to sew no further snail-bags. And yet, I suppose, the stranger meant it civilly in bringing this lost article back to me; and, therefore, there was nothing now about which to run away. Clearly, I could stay where I was, sit perfectly still, and appear quite sedate; and, in charity-school phrase, "speak up" to the stranger as composedly as if I sat darning stockings in the vicarage parlour.

And yet, when the stranger approached near enough for his features to become distinguishable, I felt the old odd tremor and incipient faintness beginning to threaten me, which I had experienced on my last most pathetic ascent to this pinnacle of tragedies. How could this be? and why should I feel thus affected? I made out the stranger to be a young man of about five and twenty, above the middle height, with fair hair, and a short, light-brown beard, good-looking, well-propor-

tioned, in a tweed shooting jacket; in short, superficially speaking, had I met him anywhere but on Stonesdale Ridge, I should have noticed little difference between him and twenty other young gentlemen of his age and aspect to be seen and found in any urban neighbourhood. Now and at my cairn, although his features were regular and pleasing, yet—— But the explanation of my “yet” will come in most appropriately by-and-by.

I repressed my tendency to shiver as he came up and stopped. When he began to speak I looked up with assumed carelessness from the pages of my Ossian.

“May I venture to restore this—property?” he began, hesitating, as well he might, how to describe what he was about to restore. His manner was very quiet and deferential. His voice broke the charm of the fanciful association suggested by his face. I felt almost myself again, and fairly equal to the situation. “I met an elderly gentleman,” continued the stranger, with a backward motion of his head, “on the Stembury side of

the down, with many similar—ahem—articles tied to his coat button-holes; and as this is rather a lonely spot, I conclude——”

“That I belong to him,” I supplied, with perfect composure. “Yes, I do belong to him. Thank you for picking this up.” I did not raise my eyes, after saying this, from my volume; and the stranger seemed in evident hesitation if he might venture another remark. I gave him no encouragement to do so, as whether he spoke or departed, was clearly no business of mine. At last, he took heart to inquire rather awkwardly, and certainly very shyly—

“May I ask, if by keeping straight forwards along this hill footpath, I must, sooner or later, descend upon Redburn village?”

“Yes,” I replied, carelessly; “walk on to the hill-edge yonder, where that plover is now flapping so slowly in the wind, and you will see the little village of Redburn at your feet.”

“Please, how long will it take me to descend?”

“From this cairn, say twenty minutes.” I

considered. "Yes, you can be in Redburn High Street under half an hour, at your rate of going."

"Pardon me," said the stranger, "I think you mentioned a cairn."

"I ought to have said a heap of stones," I rejoined, correcting myself.

"I quite understood you before," he went on, with a nod; "but being in Blankshire, and not in Scotland, I was puzzled. Does this cairn mean anything?"

"Yes," said I, curtly, "a dead man was found here."

I told this in such a business-like way, that I saw my questioner smile slightly in spite of himself; presently he added—

"Is not this an odd spot for a young lady to select to peruse her morning novel?" He said this humbly enough, and I could see that he was half afraid that I might resent this remark as an impertinence.

"For the matter of that," I returned, with conscious pride, "I have no cause to feel afraid *now*, because I found him myself *then*."

The stranger opened his eyes wide enough at this announcement, as I intended that he should. Plainly he was in great debate with himself, what kind of strange girl he had come upon. "The gentleman whom I met," he faltered, "seemed very busy looking after something; was he——?"

"Looking for dead men," I interposed mischievously; "oh dear no! he was only looking for snails."

"They use snails a good deal across the water there?" hazarded my questioner, with a glance at the far bright strip of Channel.

"Eat them, you mean?"

"Well, yes."

"Do you suppose that I should be such a—ahem—cannibal?" I rejoined, with a slight loss of shyness, and a greater loss of temper.

The stranger looked mystified and thoroughly penitent. Evidently some other subject must be tried. So he said in a rather diffident, stumbling sort of way, "May I sit down?"

“Do not ask my leave,” I replied; “Stonedale Ridge is not my drawing-room.”

“I did not quite mean that,” was his answer; then adding with a quick glance, “yet I think you do know what I did imply perfectly well.”

He was right on that point, though I did not choose to acknowledge it. Had he leave to extend the conversation beyond the mere necessity of asking his way? That was about what he meant, and to this I had as yet returned no definite answer. I tried next a little not unnatural feminine equivocation.

“You have no right to assume any such knowledge on my part.”

“Then I may sit down?” he concluded, I must say rather inconsequently.

“I suppose so.”

He accordingly settled himself then upon one of the gritty ledges of the cairn, and, during a pause, began to behead various unoffending dandelions with his walking-stick. At length he took courage to resume, “Your aerial boudoir is nicely carpeted.”

"And you seem bent on blurring out my carpet's pattern."

"I did not know how to employ my hands."

I had nearly quoted a distich of Dr. Watts's, but I luckily stopped short in time.

"May I ask a question?" demanded the stranger in a rather impulsive manner.

I wondered what was coming next, but I said nothing.

"Why did you look so frightened just now, when I first appeared. You are not a nervous young lady, I should imagine."

"Nothing of the kind," I exclaimed resolutely.

"But I did startle you ever so much?"

"Y—yes."

"Now, why?"

"I hardly know—at least," this last with a recurrence of the shiver, "I think, now you have put it to me point-blank, that I have just discovered why you frightened me; though ten minutes since, I could not, in all candour, have answered you. You are dreadfully like *him*!"

"Him!" echoed my questioner, in amazement. "And, pray, who is this double of mine?"

"The dead man whom I told you about." No sooner had I said this than I felt quite vexed with myself, for having confessed to him or any one about the strange and utterly fanciful resemblance, which I have conjured up.

"Sounds flattering, I must say," he observed, in a tone of wonder blended with a spice of annoyance. "Well, I must look ghastly enough, in all conscience, this morning. I had better hire myself out to one of the tenants to frighten the rooks away, as an amateur scare-crow."

I explained rather lamely, and blushing crimson, that I made quite sure now that I had been mistaken; that I had spoken rashly, after the manner of maidens; that his sudden and unexpected appearance on the very spot of the tragedy had associated his features somehow (and quite unreasonably) with those other ones; that, on second

thoughts, no two faces could be more unlike, and much more in this apologetic strain.

The stranger smiled at about the third sentence of my apology, and laughed outright before I had concluded. "My good young lady unknown," he interposed, checking my torrent of excuses, "I am amply appeased; and entreat that no further word may be said about my wraith. I may cherish a lingering suspicion, that your impulsive frankness must have contained a grain of truth, however unpalatable to your humble servant; but let that pass. I am pacified, and re-assert my right to the ranks of the living, though I did appear before you, I allow, in a manner altogether ghostlike. But my self-complacency is restored, and my uncle's tenants must continue to employ the conventional scare-crow. I shall lend them no assistance."

"Your uncle's tenants?" I repeated, my curiosity for the moment overpowering my sense of politeness.

"Ah," he rejoined, smiling; "see how this

flimsy ghost cannot speak without unmasking himself. But it is time that I trudged on to this same uncle's. And now you guess my identity, and I own that I should like to be able to do as much for yours." Here he paused, but I gave him no assistance. "Well, so be it. Time, the revealer, will in due course unfold your name; for I am to remain, I believe, ever so long in these regions, and I fancy that we must meet again."

"I wish you good morning," said I, not knowing well how else to conclude an interview, which was becoming sufficiently embarrassing.

The stranger took off his hat, and pursued his way. I watched him descend the hillside in the direction of Redburn.

A dozen questions began to clamour all at once for solution in my mind, when I again found myself left in solitude. Who could he be? and what on earth would he think of that strange nondescript, the present narrator, who sat on the hill-top, ate snails, and found dead men? Then off I went at

a tangent, as to whether he really was like my poor wanderer; but I settled that this supposed resemblance of the two was fancy and nonsense—the mere outcome of a heated imagination. Then, did I think the stranger good-looking at all?—a question which I felt inclined to decide in the affirmative. And so back again to the central question of, Who was he? Nephew; tenantry. Could his uncle be——

At this point must my father reappear, when I did not in the least require him. Heated came the vicar and unsuccessful, snapping my not unpleasant day-dream with lamentations, many and pathetic, upon the non-appearance of the irrepressible and tedious “stonecutter.” A vexed, breathless, querulous vicar, requiring sympathy and condolence, when I wished to be at peace and alone with my own thoughts. However, with a patience really commendable, I allowed my parent to restate, point by point, the arguments *pro* and *con* this snail’s nativity. I stood this till he arrived at “fourthly;”

then I broke in impetuously with the unscientific but more interesting query, whether he had noticed a young man? My father promptly rejoined, "Yes." Tom Collins, the shepherd, he had seen, and had asked him after his family and his rheumatism. I warmly repudiated any possibility of meaning Tom Collins. No; I alluded to a man much better-looking, a person dressed like a gentleman, and speaking like one—a person whose uncle had tenants. Tom Collins, indeed! What did the vicar mean by suggesting that lout?

My father penitently explained that nothing answering in any way to Miss Salvia's description had traversed his side of the hill. Still, the search had been so minute and so absorbing that twenty such folks might have almost brushed his elbows without his noticing them. Why did Salvia want to know?

His daughter found these simple and artless questions often the hardest to answer. I felt so disconcerted, indeed, that I took

refuge in that hackneyed feminine reason,
"Because I choose to know."

There was no getting beyond this; so the vicar conceded me that point, and passed on to the next.

"What makes you think this foot-passenger's uncle has tenants?" was my father's second inquiry.

"Bless the man! didn't the stranger tell me so?"

"Then you spoke to this pedestrian?"

"Why can't you call him reasonable names?" I exclaimed, ready to quarrel at anything. "'Pedestrian'—'foot-passenger'—why not say 'gentleman,' Mr. Vicar?"

"Then you spoke to this gentleman?" repeated my father. "What did he say to you?"

"Asked me his way, to be sure," I returned, snappishly, "and brought one of your every-second-minute-lost bags, which he had picked up between here and Stembury. Take the thing back. There! I am not going to be accused of entering into conversation with

every chance man who turns up on a hill-side, through these contemptible snail-sacks."

The truth was, I felt vexed and spiteful with myself that a conversation had occurred not wholly unlike the one which I had so emphatically repudiated. Had I done right in allowing the stranger to address me without an introduction, as they say, at all? I felt by no means conscience-clear upon the point; so, after the manner of my sex, I paid out my petulance upon the nearest object, my unoffending father.

"Have you had sufficient mountain reading?" resumed the vicar, forbearingly. "I don't wish to hurry you, and perhaps I might as well give one more cast round the hill ledges for the 'stonecutter;' though I confess to you that I have abandoned all hopes of bringing this precious species within my molluscan fold. Still, one more cast—it will be a labour of love, and science never grudges trouble."

"I am tired to death of these aerial solitudes," was my reply, given in no amiable

voice. "So, if you must hunt any longer, please excuse your wearied assistant, whose soul is not elevated enough to appreciate the raptures of shell-picking."

"Then let us descend to Redburn at once. I had forgotten how tedious must seem to you the pursuit of this hobby."

Dear old father! How impossible it was to put him out! and how often I should have lost my temper, had I, the narrator, been afflicted with the possession of a daughter like myself!

"Return to Redburn!" I sneered, not in the least propitiated by his extreme forbearance. "I hate Redburn, and all that belongs to it. Just look down upon it. Did you ever see such a round, little, pent-up, limited, miserable dog-kennel?"

"Humph!" said the vicar, wisely abstaining from any present championship of his libelled benefice. "I hope, my dear, that you have not taken a chill, for you do not seem your usual self. What can be the matter with you?"

"I don't know," I rejoined, tartly, and, to

tell the truth, I did not know then ; although I have since begun to have my slight suspicions of what then was beginning to be the matter with me.

So we descended to the parsonage rather leisurely, and in no very conversable mood. As we passed the Merlin, the vicar, at my suggestion, went in and asked the landlady whether she was harbouring just then any stranger tourists. My father emerging with a distinct negative, was directly sent back by the curiosity of a pertinacious daughter with this more comprehensive query, had Mrs. Appleby on that special afternoon observed any stranger passing through the village ? On this amended and enlarged interrogatory, the vicar reported that, though the landlady could only account for familiar faces in her experience of that day, yet Jack, the ostler, who was taking his dish of tea in the bar, had announced that no less a person than Sir Sidney's expected nephew, Mr. Richard Leyland, had walked down the High Street not half an hour since. Him Jack "dare said" to

be a stranger to the vicar; for was he not a stranger to well-nigh all of them? And if the coachman from the Priory had not just then been passing Jack the time of day and inquiring casually after that there colt of Farmer Digweed's, a stranger he, Muster Leyland, might have continued to him, Jack aforesaid. Howsoever, when Jack looked at him, there was something to bring back the family in the dashing up of his chin and the swinging of his arms out, both of which Sir Sidney was beknown to have had when a boy.

This and much more in Jack's peculiar dialect was duly reported by the vicar, with a view of bringing me by the narration of Jack's absurdities into a better frame of temper. Certain it is, that I listened to the recital with a roused interest and a keen one, for a hint much less definite than this one would have enabled me to recognize instantly Sir Sidney's nephew in the stranger of the cairn on Stonesdale Ridge. So home to supper and to bed, with much new food for reflection.

CHAPTER IX.

COW-DRIVING.

So Richard Leyland, hitherto named the stranger in this chronicle, took off his hat to Miss Salvia Richmond, and proceeded to descend the hill into Redburn village. The way was easy to find, for the hamlet spoke for itself, saying, "Here I am, and the nearest road is the readiest." But, when reached, the place seemed nearly deserted, as Richard's thick walking boots roused the echoes on the flags of the High Street. A dog or two there lay in the sun, and a child or two sat in the mud. No one else thought it necessary to account for themselves. Now must Richard ask his way, but no living soul appeared whose years sufficiently savoured of discretion

to make the query worth putting. He knew vaguely that the Priory, whither he was bound, lay to the north of Redburn village; but here was this hamlet of the dead passed through and its street had ceased into green open country, and he might go wrong, for he was not sure of the compass point. Ahead appeared an old farmer, driving a cow before him; the very person to supply the needful directions. Quickening his steps, Richard soon came up with him.

“A fine day.”

“That it be.”

“How shall I get to Redburn Priory?”

“You keep alonger me, and we shall pass the gates.”

“Cannot you direct me?”

“You keep alonger me, or find road yoursen.”

“But, really, my good man——”

“I’m no one’s man but Sir Sidney’s. My name is Digweed, and Sir Sidney’s land I live on. And, if you doubt me, ast the vicar. And I’m coming back from Stonesdale fair,

where I've bought that there cow, and if you like to lend a hand in driving her home, you shall get to the Priory. So you may take it or leave it."

"Well," thought Richard, smiling in spite of himself, "I have entered a strange region, and I am about to sustain many varied characters. Up there, I meet a lively but most incomprehensible example of female petulance, who insists that I resemble a ghost. Down here, I stumble across native No. 2, who presses me into his service as an amateur cow-driver. Heigho! Well, it would be ridiculous being a fine gentleman in these wilds, when I have no right to that character, even in Pall-Mall, so I may as well commence business as a drover."

Meantime, Richard and Digweed had trudged on, side by side, and the latter had evidently construed his companion's silence as a proffer of the required assistance. For, as they were approaching a spot where a side lane gave into the main road, the farmer exclaimed—

“Nip on in front, and stop her turning her head out of the road.”

Richard complied in a dignified manner at first; but when the cow had made several short charges down the forbidden lane, followed by brisk retreats on Mr. Digweed; when both he and Richard had to stand opposite each other with windmill-like arms, uttering hoarse cries (imitated from the farmer); Richard began to enter into the humour of the situation, and it became with him a question of deep interest how many similar cross-roads would intervene before they made the Priory gates; and whether Mr. Digweed's recent addition to his dairy would succeed or not, before that bourn was reached, in spitting him through his waistcoat on one of her very truculent horns.

However, they got her victoriously past that lane-head, and Mr. Digweed, propitiated with the recent assistance rendered by Richard, became more conversable.

“So you are for the Priory, young man?”

“Ay, if I am to reach it alive.”

The farmer saw no point in this, and continued, "You are in place there, I reckon?"

"In what, Mr. Digweed?"

"In servitude wi' Sir Sidney. I can't speak plainer."

Richard began to laugh more than ever. "I don't think you can," he managed at length to reply.

"Sir Sidney leaves too much to his steward," announced the farmer, rather abruptly.

This was getting serious. Young Haroun-al-Raschid had plainly no right to play the eavesdropper on his uncle's Grand Vizier in his assumed garb of a cow-driver. The conversation must be changed.

"Mr. Digweed," said Richard, quickly, "I don't think many people seem to live at Redburn, so you may be able to enlighten——"

"There beant many folk there," interrupted the farmer, in a tone of offence, "according to Lonnon notions; but we have as many folk there as are wanted, and no more.

We shan't send for any more, you may make certain."

"I meant no reflection," Richard began, apologetically.

"Halloa! halloa! halloa!" from Digweed, the cow having charged back upon them both suddenly, and all but effected a masterly retreat towards the home of her expropriator.

"I was saying," Richard resumed, when peace was restored, "that there could not be many resident gentlefolks in your village."

"What do you say to the vicar?"

"Yes, Mr. Digweed, that is one. Is he popular? is he a good clergyman?"

"A rare good one; he minds his own business, and let folks fend for themselves."

"How does he spend his time, then?" Richard inquired, for he could not help perceiving that this retort contained a covert condemnation of himself. "If a clergyman refrains—as you say this one does—from having anything to do with the concerns of his parishioners, however does he occupy himself?"

"Reads twice o' Sundays and makes menageries," says Digweed, rather sullenly.

"Menageries! Surely, Mr. Digweed——"

"Yah! yah! yah! Would you? Keep her out of that ditch! Halloa! halloa! halloa!"

Composure once more regained, Richard again re-echoes, "Menageries!"

"Ay, ay, dries whatever he can pick up, and writes their names upon them. Keeps them under glass. Gave my ploughboy sixpence for an extra large cricket; said it came from Italy, but I knew it came from our ten-acre. Yet he speaks as rational, as you or I, when he ain't over his vermin, and reads rarely."

"To be sure," exclaimed Richard, with a flash of inspiration; "he has a daughter, has he not?"

"Right enough, young man, Miss Salvia Richmond."

"Salvia Richmond! Ah!"

Silence for a few moments. Richard apparently thoughtful. Mr. Digweed's purchase unusually tractable.

"I suppose now," said Richard, carelessly, "your vicar's daughter would be about eighteen?"

"Atween twelve and twenty. I can come no nigher."

"How do you make that out, Mr. Digweed?"

"A this'uns," propounded the farmer, scratching his head; "about the time she were born Nero come to our place."

"Your son, Mr. Digweed?" hazarded Richard, rather dubiously.

"Nay, man, nay; our yard-cur. Nero lasted a matter o' eight year; and then come Mary Anne—she lived six year, but then she barked a sight more than Nero, which wore her out sooner, I reckon. Now we've got Chanticleer; and may he long continue, as they say in the almanacks over his Majesty, for he is mortal keen at tramps. A lurcher is Chanticleer, that he is indeed."

Leyland could take no interest in Digweed's system of chronology, so he began to whistle.

"When," resumed the farmer, doggedly, "a man says to me, 'Digweed,' or 'Mr. Digweed,' according to his station, 'when did this or that occur?' I runs them over immediate to mysen, 'Nero, Mary Anne, Chanticleer'; and then back'ards, 'Chanticleer, Mary Anne, Nero'; and if I can't fix it a that'uns, why fix it I cannot anywhen."

"Very curious," said Richard, deeply bored by the farmer's canine memoria technica. "Heigho! We are passing a nice field of swedes there."

Digweed accepted the compliment as his due, wrung from the unwilling confession of a disparaging stranger. "There ain't such another crop to be found outside this parish. Come to Redburn for swedes. We surpass England in everything!"

This was a new light to Richard, but he acquiesced silently.

"When that there very beast," proceeded Digweed, in a rather excited manner, "was bought at Stonesdale fair this here very morning, I went in with some four friends

of mine to have a glass over my bargain."

"I guessed as much when I first overtook you," thought Richard to himself.

"‘Gentlemen,’ says I, ‘charge your glasses,’ which they did. ‘I will give you a toast. “Redburn afore all England!”’ Says the landlord, ‘Put in Stonesdale, and I will join you.’ ‘Never,’ said I. “Redburn afore all England, and Stonesdale next!”’ which was drunk with cordial approbation."

"What depths of self-sufficient dreariness this man possesses!" murmured Richard; adding aloud, "So you settled that question, at any rate, to *your* satisfaction?"

"Young man," returned the farmer, dogmatically, "it needed no settling. It was settled long sin' to any one with eyes. Stonesdale, indeed! Nowheres near us!"

"And England in general?"

"Nowheres near us!"

"So be it, Mr. Digweed. Do I now see Sir Sidney's park ahead?"

"You see it right enough, and I see the Hat and Plough."

"A public-house? Take my advice, Mr. Digweed, and don't call there."

"I mun," laconic and expressive.

"Then here my assistance ends."

"You may as well tent cow for me five minutes while I go in. I would have brought my boy, but he was crow-keeping. Mrs. Atherton, she had my last boy. There ain't such boys in England for keeping crows."

"You really must excuse me. Good morning!"

"Dang thee! then," growled the farmer, by way of a parting benediction, as Richard walked on alone.

"So much for Redburnian gratitude," was the pedestrian's inward comment, as he pursued his journey. "What a delicious sense of newly restored freedom to have this terribly perverse cow no longer on one's mind. So here is the Priory Lodge, and in we go between the two stone merlins. Strange chances have beset me by the way. Perhaps

within yonder Gothic pile, whose windows glimmer behind the elm clump, fortunes yet more curious lie in wait for me. So these are the deer, or at least their descendants, which my nurse used to tell me about in our dark London home. What visions of grandeur her account used to conjure up in my infant imagination! She is dust long since, poor old thing! And here is her pet boy walking in among these same stately herds. Well, well, and now for this potentate, our uncle!"

CHAPTER X.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION.

A FEW days after Richard Leyland had met Salvia Richmond on Stonesdale Ridge, Mrs. Atherton and her daughter Edith were sitting together in their drawing-room at Tamerton Grange. Edith was at the piano, trying over a batch of new music that morning received from London. Mrs. Atherton was deeply absorbed in a volume of great domestic interest, namely, the account-book of the village butcher; the items of which, like one wary and wise in her generation, she was collating with private memoranda of her own, to the triumphant disclosure of four pounds of the leg of beef charged twice over.

Mrs. Atherton was a widow, and Edith was her only child. Captain Atherton had died a few years before our story begins. He had left the army upon his marriage, and with the proceeds of his commission, and some few thousands which his wife had brought him as her fortune, he had purchased what was then in the market as the Tamerton Grange estate. This sounded grand enough; but, in sober truth, it consisted only of some hundred and fifty acres of land, a square stucco dwelling-house with garden, shrubberies, and an anterior oblong paddock of about ten acres. Thither the newly wedded couple came, and there the captain passed the remaining seventeen years of his existence.

Mrs. Atherton used to be away each spring for a month or two with her friends in London, but the captain never stirred. He was a dull, good-natured fellow, quite satisfied with his cigar and morning stroll round his stables and property, his lunch, his afternoon ride into Stembury, his nap

over a newspaper before *dinner*—the day's great event, his short nap after dinner, his second cigar, and so to bed for the night, and *da capo*.

His property consisted of two rather small farms, let to two rather bad tenants; half a dozen cottages, in which the labourers on these farms and their respective families lived; and last, not least, a smaller gentleman's villa or kind of hunting-box, distinguished as Tamerton Cottage, of which in due time we shall hear more.

Captain Atherton, on leaving the regulars, accepted a commission in the Blankshire militia, and came in time to be a justice of the peace and a deputy-lieutenant. He was a very popular man in the county society. His politics were considered safe and moderate. The captain always stated that they were so; and we suppose he knew what he was saying. He made no one envious by his superior ability, nor did he inspire distrust either as an innovator or as a propounder of new or startling theories. He went in all

things with the ruck of the squirearchy, and when these worthies were divided on any question, he went with the largest ruck. He also had a very fair seat on horseback, and was considered on all sides as a thoroughly good fellow. Peace be to his ashes! These are the salt of England!

By his will his small property was left to his widow for her life, and after her death to their only daughter. Mrs. Atherton, on her husband's demise, managed the property with much greater shrewdness and profit. She went into every sixpence of outlay, re-valued the two farms, screwed up the cottagers' rents, suppressed the traditional glass of ale for every caller in her kitchen, stopped the gardener's wholesale pillage of garden stuff, insisted when she spent a shilling to receive a shilling's worth. And, having some ambition of her own, she was now able to afford herself and Edith a good two months each year at a private hotel in London. For Edith Atherton was now twenty, and was universally allowed to be a very pretty girl;

and her mother, and possibly Edith herself, saw no reasonable cause or impediment why Miss Atherton should not "settle" extremely well.

The ladies had returned about a fortnight from their London campaign when we make their acquaintance. While we have been explaining all about them, Edith had wearied of her music and had flung herself listlessly into an armchair; while Mrs. Atherton, having palpably convicted the butcher, was passing on to conquer new worlds in the pages of the coal merchant.

At this moment the bell of the green gate, which stood at the end of the oblong paddock and gave into the high road, tinkled a merry peal. From this entrance to the house door ran the carriage road—a distance of two hundred yards. The drawing-room windows commanded the approach—an odd but invariable country house arrangement. All visitors were thus exposed to a full fire of inspection from the inmates. The visitors, *en revanche*, could in their turn scrutinize the

house occupants as clearly as if these lived in the glass house of the proverb. We presume this arrangement subserves some useful purpose, or it would not be so widespread or so popular. So the gate bell rang, and in due time a young man was seen to enter, and walk on slowly towards the house. At a hundred and fifty yards' range neither mother nor daughter had the faintest idea who was coming to see them.

At a hundred and twenty yards' range Miss Edith had recognized the intruder perfectly, but did not, as then minded, see any necessity for enlightening her mother upon his identity.

At eighty yards' range Mrs. Atherton remembered the visitor's face, and, with a gesture of annoyance, flounced back into the body of the room, exclaiming, "If this is not the same young fellow, Edith, with whom you flirted so disgracefully at that publishing woman's party! He has tracked us out—the impertinence!—to the recesses of Blankshire. Let this be a lesson to you, my dear child. I shall say, 'Not at home.'"

"He has seen us both, mamma," suggested Edith, meekly.

"What was the creature's name?" demanded the mother, hurriedly.

"I think it was Mr. Weyland," hesitated Edith, biting her lips; "but Miss Glossop, who introduced me, did not pronounce the name very distinctly."

"Ought I to admit him?" said Mrs. Atherton, in vacillation, moving uneasily about, and thrusting the butcher's account into a table drawer. "If he has seen us—you are sure he *has* seen us?—shall I say we are engaged, or ill, or lying down? These literary people, to judge by Mrs. Glossop's party, have neither manners nor appearance. He might attempt to force his way in, and there is only Thomas to answer the door. Whatever shall I do?"

"I should send for Bridle, our rural policeman," said Edith, archly; "he will arrive under three quarters of an hour."

"This comes," observed Mrs. Atherton, with stinging emphasis, "of attracting young men

about whose antecedents one knows absolutely nothing!"

"He attracted himself!" cried Edith, tossing her head in disclaimer.

The subject of these strictures was now heard scraping his boots.

"He seems to wear hobnails," was the listening mother's comment.

The visitor was next heard fumbling among the brick-mantling creepers for the house bell.

"I noticed he had no gloves," said Mrs. Atherton, bitterly. "What gentleman ever makes a morning call without gloves? That in itself condemns this friend of yours."

"Friend or enemy," retorted her daughter, reddening, "Heaven is my witness, that I was dragged, literally dragged by you, mamma, to this Mrs. Glossop's party. Being there, after the dragging, one had to be civil. The daughter of the house introduced me, and I was tired of standing, like a gorilla, speechless in the doorway. I shall be told next that Mrs. Glossop was the friend of *my* youth."

A word of explanation here.

Mrs. Atherton and Mrs. Glossop had been schoolgirls together at a Brighton finishing academy for young ladies. An enthusiastic friendship in those days subsisted between them. When Captain Atherton appeared, radiant in scarlet and gold lace, a hero of heroes, reams of confidences had been poured through the penny post into the bosom of Selina Best. When the son of Mars came to the point, who but the same Selina, as head bridesmaid, had held the nosegay of orange flowers behind Lucy Atherton at the altar?

But Lucy whirled away behind four dashing greys to Norwood, and eventually to Blankshire. Once or twice more Selina heard, a few lines only, and then their correspondence had finally closed. Alas for female friendship! Selina Best in due time became engaged, prosaically enough. It was only to one Glossop, a bookseller. And Mrs. Atherton, to whom her late friend humbly announced her coming union, wrote her a condescending letter and sent her an ormulu

paper weight. Mrs. Atherton, the captain's wife, and the deputy-lieutenant's lady, niece of Lord Crowbury, and mistress of Tamerton Grange, heaved a sigh of pity for Selina, who always had been a plain girl; and thought, since Selina would go into the book trade, it was high time that her acquaintance should be dropped.

But Selina had not done so badly after all. Glossop was a shrewd, pushing fellow, with a notable instinct for recognizing literary talent in the rough. He made two or three very good hits by publishing books which all the "Row" had rejected with contumely. He managed in a dozen years to found a very thriving publisher's business, and became a wealthy man; and one whom authors delighted to honour.

This year the old schoolfellows met by chance, after long years of separation; and Mrs. Glossop, forgiving and affectionate, had bidden Mrs. and Miss Atherton to an evening party.

The *venue* of this entertainment was in

Bloomsbury, and for Bloomsbury Miss Edith did not care to take the trouble of adorning herself. She expected to be bored, and went under protest, in a very recalcitrant mood. Mrs. Atherton, however, feeling some remorse for her previous neglect of her early friend, determined, as some amends, to attend Mrs. Glossop's party. They did not know a soul when they got there; and, partly to pass the time, and more to pay out her mother for bringing her to so dull an entertainment, Edith began to flirt with a young literary gentleman, to whom one of the Misses Glossop had asked leave to introduce her. She found him pleasant enough, and he saw her to her carriage. Various recriminations had passed between the two ladies on their drive home.

Mrs. Atherton declared that school intimacies were a mistake, and only dragged one down in after years.

Edith begged to give her mother notice that if she was dragged out against her will, she would talk as much as she pleased to the only presentable man in the room. Subse-

quently, Edith met the only presentable man twice in her morning walks; and she suspected that the only presentable man had not crossed her path entirely by accident. But she did not feel it necessary to refer her suspicions to her parent. Now this same person is scraping his boots in Blankshire, and it is surely time he should be let in.

"Then I suppose this Mr. Weyland must be admitted?" concluded Mrs. Atherton, reluctantly.

"You won't improve matters by being uncivil, mamma," whispered Edith, hurriedly, for steps were approaching in the hall.

"O Selina Glossop! I may thank you for this!" sighed Mrs. Atherton, as the door opened and disclosed the unconscious cause of these bitter thanks.

"Mr. Rylands!" shouted Thomas, the page, as master of the ceremonies.

That youth, having opened the door, extended his arm at right angles along the panel, as a soldier about to salute, and so

allowed Richard to pass him into the drawing-room. Thomas was as yet undrilled, and only recently recruited into domestic service. Three months ago he had been one of Farmer Digweed's boys ; Digweed, *facile princeps* in his own dull brain in all items of agricultural produce. On the farm of this remarkable man, Thomas had been a crow-keeper (a reference to Shakspeare or any modern Midlander will tell you what that means) ; three short months only, and now he stood in the many-buttoned glories of a tight brown suit and a white evening necktie.

Edith came forward and received Richard kindly enough. Mrs. Atherton sat stiff and stately on an ottoman opposite the fireplace. The metaphor of having swallowed a poker is too ungenteel to be applied to Lord Crowbury's niece ; otherwise we should here have found it useful.

"My mother, Mr. Weyland."

A very slight inclination from the mother.

"You are, no doubt, surprised to see me in Blankshire, Miss Atherton," began Richard, putting his hat down.

"We are somewhat surprised to see you at Tamerton Grange," said the mother, intercepting her daughter's reply.

An inauspicious commencement this; but Richard held on, "When I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance at Mrs. Glossop's delightful party——"

"Delightful party!" echoed Mrs. Atherton, *sotto voce*, with a curl of the lip.

"Blankshire was the last spot upon the inhabited universe, in which I at this time expected to find myself."

"It is a pity that your plans should have been changed," observed the mother, with cutting emphasis.

"As to that," proceeded Richard, airily, "a Bohemian, like myself, is sure to light upon his feet anywhere. I am used to roughing it, though at present I am smoothing it, if the expression be permitted."

"You mean that you are just now in good quarters?" said Edith, speaking for the first time.

"Excellent, at Redburn."

“Dear me! I should not have thought that,” remarked the young lady.

A pause, broken by Richard. “Do you hear often from Mrs. Glossop?”

“I never hear from Mrs. Glossop,” said the mother, with decision. “At present our acquaintance is of the slightest. In the past I did know Mrs. Glossop—to some extent. She has since gone her path, and I have gone mine. Her path has been a commercial one. We never meet. I looked in at her party out of good nature. She made a great point of my coming. With Mr. Glossop, who is, I believe, some kind of bookseller, I have no acquaintance. He is, no doubt, a worthy man in his way; oh, quite a worthy man!”

“I ought to speak of him with all gratitude,” confessed Richard, with a slight flush; “he employed me on several occasions when employment was to me of the greatest consequence.”

Plainly the niece of Lord Crowbury was receiving very indifferent company. This young fellow, then, depended at times for his

bread on the despised husband of her despised friend! Things were come to a pretty pass, when, under the engraved picture of that avuncular and venerated nobleman, in his somewhat heating parliamentary robes, Glossop's hack sat in assumed equality, dispensing small talk, and casting glances at her daughter. Surely, a social cataclysm was at hand!

"I confess," pursued Richard, "that I found Mrs. Glossop's party very interesting. I saw there so many celebrities—people, you know, who have made themselves remarkable in such various departments of art and literature.

"Most of the guests, especially the ladies," replied Mrs. Atherton, "had eminently succeeded in their attire and exterior in rendering themselves, as you say, remarkable."

The topic of the Glossops was evidently unpalatable. The elder lady seemed determined to snub him. Richard, therefore, turned, as a last resource, to the daughter.

"I had no means of connecting you with

Blankshire, Miss Atherton, until a few days back. 'Twas the merest chance I heard of you. A farmer, named Mr. Digweed, a truculent, conceited old fellow, told me Mrs. Atherton had engaged one of his—I think he called it 'crow-boys.' ”

The mother blushed up to her eyes at this, and, biting her lip, retorted viciously, “You are acquainted, then, with Mr. Digweed?”

“Oh yes,” agreed Richard, with a shrug; “we are the best of friends. I had been, in fact, helping him with a refractory cow.”

Mrs. Atherton raised her eyebrows at this extraordinary sample of her visitor's rustic pursuits.

“I was so worried with the cow just then,” Richard went on, while the widow listened in silent amazement, “that, though I heard your name plainly enough, yet I did not even think to question Digweed further. Yesterday, however, a lady in Redburn High Street—I was just outside the Merlin at the time—again brought your name upon the

carpet, or, I ought to say, upon the pavement. So I thought I would venture to call."

"Calls are perilous ventures in Blankshire," replied Edith, lightly and laughingly, but with an evident hint and purpose in her remark. "You have no idea how ceremonious we are on such points in these rural regions."

"You astonish me!" exclaimed Richard. "Now, as a Londoner, I should have expected just the contrary; namely, that in a country neighbourhood, even an introduction would be barely necessary. I met a young lady on my first arrival, who was good enough not to require one."

"Such young ladies are doubtless to be met with," observed Mrs. Atherton, with a virtuous shudder. "But I would rather not discuss them. As regards Blankshire exclusiveness," she went on to explain, with frigid candour and North Pole condescension, "my daughter means that our society in this neighbourhood consists of a few families, who know each other extremely well, and who keep to themselves and among themselves."

Consequently, we are not over anxious to widen the number of our mere acquaintances." Having thus, as she believed, crushed her unfortunate visitor into the earth, Mrs. Atherton, in quiet triumph, took up some knitting, and feigned to be wholly unconscious of the presence of the intruder.

At this supreme moment of conversational awkwardness, Edith came forward with good-natured palliatives. "And who told you that we were natives of these wilds?" she demanded, with assumed ease and cheerfulness.

Richard, adopting her tone, replied, "Quite a funny old woman, with poppies and ears of barley in her bonnet, whom I met in the street of Redburn village. I cannot even tell you her name, but she hoped I would subscribe to some schools, and I told her I would think it over. I suppose she is a district visitor, or a female missionary."

"Who could it have been?" asked Edith, interested; "and how came she to mention my humble self?"

"The oddest things have happened since I

came down to Blankshire," explained Richard, becoming more comfortable, for Mrs. Atherton, though she kept resolutely aloof from the dialogue, did not seem disposed to rush in to his further demolition just yet. "London life is so tame; Blankshire life seems full of surprises. I am beginning to be astonished at nothing which happens to me down here;" with a furtive glance at Mrs. Atherton, which her daughter met with a look of intelligence; "so that when a lady with poppies, whom I had never seen before, advanced in Redburn High Street and treated me with the most absurd deference, and made me a low sweeping curtsy——Well, I was not used to that kind of thing——"

"That I can well believe," was Mrs. Atherton's sarcastic comment to herself, as she sat with eyes still firmly rivetted upon her work. She might have been some Lady of Shalot, who was to be cursed if she intermitted her knitting.

"I thought at first her wits were clean gone," continued Richard, employing his idle

hands on his hat-brim; "but I soon found that she was only curious and scatter-brained. She subjected me to a running fire of questions, most of which I have forgotten, and few of which I could reply to. She ran over a string of names—all neighbours, I suppose—and I did not know them? I knew nothing about any one of them. Then she mentioned one Miss Edith Atherton, and mentioned you in such a way that I felt sure it must be the Miss Edith Atherton whom I had met at Mrs. Glossop's. I replied that I believed I did know Miss Edith Atherton; and that seemed to relieve her. For I do believe it is actual physical pain to a truly inquisitive soul to pump for information with no reciprocity of supply. Oh, I did know somebody at last! she seemed to say, by an abrupt twist which she gave her head, and which set all her barley beards shivering. So I thought I would now have my innings as catechizer, and I took heart to ask her where you lived. She told me Tamerton Grange, and I inquired in what direction. Where-

upon she did a most extraordinary thing——”

Edith could scarcely control her amusement; but her mother loomed blacker and blacker above her enchanted web. The needles went faster and faster, and, though silent, she looked volumes.

“My fair unknown, in the autumnal head-dress—Ceres, let us name her—called there-upon in a harsh voice (her voice is peculiarly metallic,)” continued Richard, trifling with a paper-cutter, “to a weak-eyed and meek little clergyman, who was—how shall I phrase it?—‘lackadaisying’ with a heavily built young lady against the shop-window of the village photographer; and Ceres asked—ordered him, I should say—to trudge off, there and then, and show me the way to Tamerton. I was horrified, first at this unceremonious treatment of the Church, and more at my guide’s being obliged to leave his sweet—well, young lady, in the lurch.”

“I think it must be Mrs. Hammersley,

mamma," said Edith, appealing laughingly to her mother.

"I am not interested at all in the occurrence," said Mrs. Atherton, grim as ever; and the knitting match against time went resolutely on.

"So I declined the escort, with thanks," Richard concluded; "but noted her instructions for another day; and I went back into the Merlin, and turned out the gamekeepers, and that's about all."

An associate of gamekeepers, a driver of cows, an occupant of a village pot-house! This was growing serious. Mrs. Atherton did not rate literary men very high, but she had not expected such a depth of Bohemianism as this. It was her duty to clear up the point at once.

"And so you are staying at Redburn?" she asked abruptly of Richard, swooping down suddenly into the conversation.

"Yes, indeed, that is my present abode."

"And what do you think, pray, of the company and of the accommodation?"

Richard looked puzzled at so odd an inquiry.

"Mamma means, are you not very uncomfortable at—ahem—the place where you are staying?"

"I never was in such luxurious quarters in my life," said Richard, with effusion. "In fact, when I return to my literary haunts in town, I fear I shall have become quite a Sybarite, and unable to rough it as a literary beginner must."

Mrs. Atherton thought of Goldsmith in squalid Green Arbour Court, and the cabbage-stalks and squalling children of the gutter. The garrets of Grub Street, as depicted in the satirical poetry of the last century, arose before her indignant mind. Here was a waif, on his own confession, from the very kennels of literature; a knight of industry in the worst sense; a scribe, who slept like Margery Dawe did. In an evil day, she again told herself, had she broken bread with that literary tag-rag at Mary Glossop's! She remembered one or more geniuses at that

ill-starred party, whose unkempt and abounding manes seemed to suggest escapes from the iron cages of the Zoological Gardens. And were there, then, depths of misery to which a fetid Merlin bedroom could seem luxurious? How should she get this garriteer away? How, when dismissed, should she prevent his return? Plainly she would write her mind to Selina Glossop, and write that mind bluntly. To Selina's bad taste the original introduction was due; she had planted this adventurer on Edith; she must cancel the acquaintance. Of course she must!

Matters were clearly coming fast to a crisis with the mother above her busy needles. Still they swept on; but Richard foresaw that when they stopped the curse of Shalot would fall, though not quite as it did in the Arthurian fable. He read as much in the mother's ominously compressed lips, and in the vicious way in which she trifled with her worsted. He was going to meet the tempest, full drench. Since the last skirmish,

even his younger ally had begun to flutter and fall from him. Like some pretty bird in the lull before a storm, poor Miss Edith would fain have taken flight and shelter. He really pitied Edith more than himself, and in reply to an eloquent glance, in which he endeavoured silently to tell her as much, she made a last effort to put things right by insisting—

“Now do assure mamma that you were only joking when you said you liked your Redburn rooms? Confess, now, that they are incommodious.”

“My dear Miss Atherton,” protested Richard, utterly bewildered. He saw the point was somehow a serious one with the mother; yet of a duenna so full of groundless prejudice, what propitiation was possible? The lady in the poppies was a lamb to this one. Were all Blankshire matrons as eccentric as these two?—his first seen examples of the class. He was beginning, in his turn, to feel a little nettled, and rejoined, with a spice of impatience, “My good Miss Edith,

your mother should allow for differences in taste. If I like the rooms, why should I not confess it? What is the harm of my saying so? I delight in their quaint antiquity. Their only fault is, that they are much too good for me. There must be some mistake. There have been nothing but mistakes since I reached this inf—I mean unfortunate county!”

“There is no mistake,” said Mrs. Atherton, majestically rising and ringing the bell; “merely this; Selina Glossop’s friends are not my friends. Selina Glossop’s daughter has no right to hand on her acquaintances to my daughter. I must wish you a good day. Thomas, the door.”

Edith, not knowing which side to take, began to cry. Richard retired without a word, in the greatest confusion. The *ci-devant* crow-keeper followed, evidently under strict orders to get him clear of the grounds; so Thomas, with suspicion in his youthful glances, carefully saw him through the green gate, and locked him out upon the dusty highway road beyond.

"Well," exclaimed Richard, rousing himself as if from a dream, "is this Blankshire world turned upside down? Yesterday, one woman grovels to me in the public street, as if I were a prince of the blood royal. To-day, another shows me from her house, as if I were a pickpocket. What does it mean? What have I done?"

"Simply this, good friend Richard," the author craves leave to remark; "the next time you call upon a young lady, who does not know much about you, and whose mother does not know you at all, remember to send up first your visiting card, or the consequences may prove embarrassing."

Let us return to the Tamerton ladies.

"Have you seen him out, Thomas?" Mrs. Atherton was asking of the returned crow-keeper."

"Yes, ma'am," said Thomas, valiantly; "I seed 'un out."

"Have you locked the outer gate?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did he go away quietly?"

"He shook hisself once or twice, ma'am. But I put him along."

"Let John see that the plate is all right."

"Yes, 'm." Exit the crow-keeper.

"My dear mother, how can you be so absurd?" expostulated Edith, with an hysterical sob. "Mr. Weyland is doubtless very poor, but you have no right to assume that he is dishonest."

"I wish you joy," said the mother, bitterly, "of your admirer! How can you demean yourself to attract such—scum?"

It is difficult to convey any adequate idea of the withering scorn with which this epithet was launched at poor Richard's devoted head.

"I do not know that he is my admirer," said Edith, not quite ingenuously. "At any rate, he will not come again after his treatment here to-day, so that the question of whether he admired me or not in the past is now supremely unimportant."

"As Lord Crowbury's niece," said the mother, with quiet dignity, "I mean to keep both myself and my daughter select."

"Bother Lord Crowbury! What has he ever done for us, mamma? I am sure he seemed to snub us when we last saw him, nearly as much as you have snubbed Mr. Weyland to-day."

Mrs. Atherton changed the subject. "Promise me, Edith, that you will never speak to this young writer again."

"I shall never see him again, mamma, to speak to; the promise is superfluous, but I make it."

"I breathe again," said Mrs. Atherton. "I think I asserted the family position not inadequately."

"I think our 'position' will land me as an old maid," grumbled Edith. "You have always a hole to pick, mamma, in any one who seems disposed to come forward."

"Ungrateful girl!" exclaimed her mother; "this last admirer was riddled like a target with drawbacks."

"Peace be to his ashes!" said Edith. "We shall see him no more. He will never come again."

"I hope not," returned Mrs. Atherton; "indeed, if this young man has one grain of gentleman-like feeling left, he will forbear to force himself upon us again."

"Surely, mamma, you are somewhat illogical," said Edith, quickly. "You have settled it to your full satisfaction that Mr. Weyland is a thief. How then can you trust to his gentleman-like feeling for keeping him away?"

"I will have him locked up if he comes again," replied the widow, curtly; "so let him come!"

In immediate response to Mrs. Atherton's defiance, the bell of the outer gate pealed heavily again.

"You have done it now, mamma!" exclaimed Edith.

Mrs. Atherton turned pale, and clasped the arm of her daughter.

"He has certainly returned. We are two unprotected women. Shall we escape by the back yard? He is evidently a desperate character."

"The gate is locked," cried Edith, en-

couragingly, "and the wall is high, and hedge-hogged with broken bottles. We can stand a siege!"

"Thomas! Thomas!" reiterated the widow, rushing out into the entrance hall; "run to the garden and summon the coachman to assist you at once. Bid him drop his nails, hammer, and cloth-tags; let him leave the peach tree, and go with you instantly. I suspect that person has returned. Go, both of you—both of you, I say—and see who is ringing for admission in the road. The coachman is not to lose time in getting on his livery coat. Let him accompany you in his shirt-sleeves; in fact, just as he is—you understand me, Thomas? not a moment is to be lost!" Issuing these multifarious orders with great promptitude and sternness of countenance, Mrs. Atherton sank down in an armchair, and fanned herself with a pocket-handkerchief.

A repeated and rather impatient jerk at the bell did not serve to tranquillize her apprehensions. Presently, the coachman was

seen advancing to the onset. He had obeyed Mrs. Atherton and gone forth as he was. How changed from the liveried and pipe-clayed glories of the box-seat of Mrs. Atherton's landau! At his heels came Thomas, who really glittered as he went; for his buttons, flashing in the sun, gave him an aspect both martial and imposing. They had loosed the watch-dog as an impromptu ally, and he too paced on sedately to repel the invader.

Mrs. Atherton nervously watched their progress.

"Now we shall know," she murmured, as, on reaching the gate, the coachman, hoisted up the page on his shoulders to reconnoitre the aggressor outside. She could see that Thomas, even at that dizzy elevation, touched his forelock to the person unknown, whom that vantage ground disclosed to him as waiting in the road. Then, and not till then, did Mrs. Atherton feel that the citadel was saved; for the loyal Thomas would never have performed that instinctive act of rustic

homage to the re-advancing enemy in the person of the lately extruded Richard.

"It is all right, my dear," she re-assured her daughter. "I see by the demeanour of our Thomas that the ringer at the gate is some one quite respectable. We may now set our minds at ease. But I confess this has given me a start indeed."

Thomas was now seen to descend slowly to *terra firma* from the stalwart shoulders of the coachman. On reaching earth Thomas in the horizon began to dust his hands, apparently freeing them from the moss and dust adherent to the top coping of the wall.

"It quite reminds one," said Edith, with her chin rested on her mother's shoulder, "of the dwarf on the back of the giant, who sees further than the giant."

"Is this a time for proverbs?" exclaimed her mother, snappishly. "I am all on edge to ascertain what manner of person is about to enter. Now, see, the coachman leans forward to turn the key. One side of the gate is flung wide open. Some one slides in between

him and the boy. Whom have we here? A man? No, a woman. Can you make her out? I seem to know her gait."

"I should know that bonnet, mamma, among a hundred," cried Edith, shaking with merriment. "Whom do you suppose we have received with the full honours of war?"

"That tiresome Mrs. Hammersley," answered the widow, leaving the window abruptly. "I see her plainly now. How she always chooses just the wrong moment to arrive! Pertinacious creature! I am in no mood to listen to her idle gossip now."

"Then don't see her?" was Edith's suggestion.

"Trust her for having learnt from Thomas already that I am at home," sighed Mrs. Atherton, arranging her flounces. "I am vexed that she has seen the coachman in his gardening undress. How shall we explain the yard-dog? Anyhow, I shall have the satisfaction of giving her a good setting down about her officiousness in sending this young penny-a-liner to call upon us."

"You tell me, mamma," observed Edith, demurely, "never to use slang. Now 'penny-a-liner' can hardly be a classical English word. Suppose I were to say to Mrs. Hammersley, 'We have just had an awfully jolly penny-a-liner to visit us!' who would be blamed then?"

Mrs. Atherton's reply was petulant and slightly illogical. "I am your mother, Edith, and have a right to speak as I please."

This was in fact, *Ego rex sum et supra grammaticam* in a slightly modified form. The daughter was silenced, and remained watching the on-comers.

"I desire you, Edith," said her mother, "to quit that window instantly. I wish to evince no interest in Mrs. Hammersley's approach."

"'Tis a kind of processional advance," commented the incorrigible Edith, slightly displacing the blind to peer forth, "in which one can't help feeling interested. First comes Neptune, curvetting and gambolling like a

lamb. If Neptune were smaller and thinner, his playfulness would become him better. But he does not get out often, poor old dog ! so it is a shame to criticize his honest transports. Next stalks Mrs. Hammersley, in the fancy dress of a corn-field. Thomas struts behind her, preserving his interval carefully, as if he were seeing her to church in the London fashion, and were freighted with the hymn-books. Last, but not least, more humbly steps the coachman ; he participates in this 'trionfo' under protest, shorn of his insignia of office, and altogether at a disadvantage."

"Be good enough to conclude these ridiculous reflections," interrupted Mrs. Atherton, tartly. "You are perfectly visible through that blind."

"How fortunate it is," remarked Edith, as she joined her mother on the ottoman, "that some folks have no sense of humour ! Now, I should not care to march, like Zenobia, in so heterogeneous a procession of Triumph under the full view of a neighbour's windows."

“Do not let us satirize our neighbours,” said Mrs. Atherton, reprovingly. “It is to be lamented that one cannot believe a word which Julia Hammersley says; yet her energy is immense, and she possesses many estimable qualities. Hush! here she is.”

Close on which admonition to silence appeared the cause of it in person. The *cortège* now dividing itself, *exeunt* Neptune and coachman to the stables, enter Mrs. Hammersley and Thomas to the drawing-room. Thomas seemed disposed to give Mrs. Atherton an account of the campaign, but his mistress promptly frowned him into silence.

The vicar's wife came in a little dashed from her normal exuberance. Mrs. Atherton greeted her with a rather faint welcome. As the possessor of so many good qualities, Mrs. Hammersley might have claimed a warmer recognition.

“I am sorry to have to bring complaints against any one's household,” their visitor commenced, untying her bonnet-strings and breathing heavily. “But, my dear Mrs.

Atherton, at the present moment you may knock me down with a feather."

Nobody, however, appeared to wish to make the experiment; so Mrs. Hammersley merely hazarded, in continuation, that there seemed to be thunder about, which might be true in several senses. She then recurred to her wrongs.

"Your servants received me just now most strangely."

"They shall be reprimanded," said Mrs. Atherton, carelessly.

"That yard-dog of yours seems hardly safe without a muzzle. He ranged around me just now in a manner really menacing. Is he usually at large when the weather is so sultry?"

"On the contrary," interposed Mrs. Atherton, feigning entire ignorance of the foray, "Neptune is always chained up. He is quite harmless; but some people are nervous. Once or twice he has slipped his collar; I suppose that he has done so now."

"Nervous, indeed!" cried Mrs. Hammersley,

bridling up; "and not before nerves were natural. I stood ringing and ringing, and not a soul would come. At length I heard footsteps behind the gate, and voices, a man's and a boy's. I declare that your coachman said distinctly, 'Tear him, good dog!' and your boy used another expression of encouragement, which I decline to repeat. And then the great brute gave a low responsive growl, and they both laughed."

Mrs. Atherton sat like a stoic; but her daughter, at this recital, quite gave way, and, becoming convulsed, buried her face in her handkerchief.

It was really provoking of Edith to desert her mother at a moment so critical. Still, Mrs. Atherton's resources were equal to the exigencies of the situation.

"Let me explain," spake Mrs. Atherton, blandly and unmoved. "My yard-dog was encouraged to seize—not yourself, my dear Mrs. Hammersley, but some kind of destructive vermin. My servants, doubtless, took out the dog to catch—ahem—a rabbit

in the shrubbery. Rabbits *are* destructive animals in shrubberies, I understand; so are weasels."

"But why did they not open the gate?" demanded Mrs. Hammersley, pertinently enough. "If they were really rabbit-catching, why did that imp—I mean that page of yours—climb the wall and grin down at me from the broken bottles? Surely to open the gate was twice as easy."

"But the rabbit would have escaped," urged Mrs. Atherton, with some presence of mind.

This staggered Mrs. Hammersley a good deal, who sat for the next few moments speechless, and slowly shaking her head.

"I will give orders," promised Mrs. Atherton, with an air of frank concession, "that all such rabbit-hunts shall be in future discontinued. And now let us change the subject. Are your husband and daughter well?"

"And how is Mr. Meadows?" added Edith, with the gentlest spice of irony in the question.

The young lady could not have hit upon a happier topic, in the discussion of which Mrs. Hammersley could forget the troubles that had betided her reception. Her mind had been full of her son-in-law designate up to the moment when she rang at the Tamer-ton Grange gate; so she forgot and forgave Neptune, and went off at score to this effect—

“How is Meadows, indeed!” she hurried on. “A pretty fellow to engage himself to be married!” (The parish version of this incident was different.) “I don’t blame him for not having a penny now beyond his stipend, and he is not worth that either, as I have often said to Hammersley, for his voice can no more fill the church than a cricket’s. But I do blame him, with a wife and a family in prospect to support—I do blame him for letting chances slip, and not putting himself forward more. There! I could have shaken him in Redburn High Street by the roots of his hair, a nincompoop! ‘Meadows,’ said I, ‘you have let him go. Mark my words! You will never get a patron, and you will never

get a living.' At this Lucy, who always takes his part (and very undutiful of her to do so), ups and says, 'If the gentleman did not want Charles to come with him, how is Charles to blame?' 'Simply this, Miss Pert,' said I—I set her down nicely, and she owned afterwards I was right—'if a poor man like Meadows, with his way to make, merely goes from his fine pauper feelings with those who want him, he will go with none at all. Patrons are not got on this footing. Meadows has neither will nor energy. If Meadows had *meant* to show this young man his way, he could have done it. I should like to see the man who would prevent *me* from showing him his way.' 'And then, Meadows, on the road, you might have introduced your prospects. That is the way to worm yourself on. I make the opportunity for Lucy's sake and interest, and for the children whom I shudder to think of starving hereafter. I show you the chance and you let him bow you off; and as sure, Meadows, as I stand here, yonder disappearing figure, to which you would not

show the way, is patron of three livings, or his uncle is, which comes to the same thing.' And don't you think I was right, Mrs. Atherton, all things considered?"

Now Mrs. Atherton found it extremely difficult to answer this sudden concluding appeal to her judgment, inasmuch as her visitor's statement of the unhappy curate's delinquencies had been both hurried and involved. It seemed safest, therefore, to Edith's mother to inquire, what reply Mr. Meadows had made to the strictures of his mother-in-law-elect, which Mrs. Atherton accordingly proceeded to do. Edith hazarded at the same time a remark that their visitor had been a little hard upon Lucy's "young man."

"La! my dear Miss Atherton," explained the vicar's wife, with a shrill, deprecating laugh; "I only scold Meadows from a mother's duty, in hopes of rousing him; but rouse him I cannot. And, as to your mamma's question respecting what he said in reply, Meadows only cried. It is like hitting a cushion to scold him. There is no satisfac-

tion in it, except from having acted a parent's part."

"And about this patron," reminded Edith, rather hesitatingly; "about somebody, you know, you met, who might have given him a living—or perhaps I have misunderstood you?"

"I was coming to that," pursued Mrs. Hammersley, with a meaning nod and smile at Edith's mother; "but perhaps Miss Edith may find the subject embarrassing; if so, I can discuss it with Mrs. Atherton, privately and presently."

Edith flushed a little at this, but said she did not understand their visitor's allusion.

"Then," went on Mrs. Hammersley, with increasing archness, "voting Miss Edith out of the room, have you, or have you not, had a rather unexpected caller?"

"It is useless to deny that we have," admitted Mrs. Atherton, with much gloom and more reluctance.

"I knew as much!" exclaimed the vicar's wife, with keen triumph. "I said he would

call, though Lucy and Charles were against me. There! I knew he would come."

"I believe," said Mrs. Atherton, very coldly, while Edith cast down her eyes, "that we may thank you, Mrs. Hammersley, for showing our unexpected visitor the way——"

"Don't mention thanks!" cried Mrs. Hammersley, effusively. "I was only too glad to do you a good turn. Yes, it was all my doing, and if anything comes of it——"

"Nothing will come of it," interposed Mrs. Atherton, sternly.

"But something may," pursued their visitor, hopelessly obtuse to the gathering tempest in Mrs. Atherton's looks. "One never knows, and something may. I think the young man is smitten. But should anything come of it, I know Miss Edith will remember poor Lucy and Charles; and, indeed, the smallest of the three livings would be an ample provision."

"I must end this, Mrs. Hammersley," broke in Edith's mother, abruptly.

"Eh?" said the other, with a start, noticing at length that something was amiss.

"You have encouraged a young man to come and call upon my daughter and myself."

"I am sure I meant to do you a good turn," protested Mrs. Hammersley, aghast.

"A good turn!" echoed the other lady. "An associate of gamekeepers, an occupant of the Merlin!"

"He *was* out with the keepers," stammered Mrs. Hammersley, "and he went into the Merlin just for a moment—and what harm in either? What is come to you, Mrs. Atherton? You may knock me down with a feather!"

The vicar's wife had quite lost her presence of mind; and again, for the second time that day, she found herself in that delicate state of equilibrium.

After these apparent prevarications, Mrs. Atherton felt that it was wrong to spare the visitor any longer. So she administered her *coup de grace* in these words, "You have

taken a great and unwarrantable liberty in sending this young fellow on here. He lives in a London garret, and writes for his bread. We know nothing of him beyond a casual and most unlucky introduction at a very mixed London party. He forced his way in here this morning, behaved in a very free and easy manner, talked of his low associates and wretched lodgings, and was requested by me to leave. Altogether, it has been a most awkward affair ; and we thank you and your officiousness, Mrs. Hammersley, for it."

During the concluding sentences of this harangue, the vicar's wife had risen in high dudgeon to depart. Now, as she stood with her hand upon the door, she said, addressing Edith, " Your mother is out of temper, and cannot mean what she says. I now take my leave. The wife of an English clergyman was never treated worse. I have been bated with watch-dogs, and that I overlooked. I have been called officious for sending you the best *parti* in the county to call. You tell me you have shown Mr. Richard Leyland

downstairs, and I am quite content to follow him." So saying, she swept out in great scorn.

"Mr. Richard Leyland," mused the widow, as the door closed behind the wrathful skirts of her departing visitor. "And pray who is this Mr. Richard Leyland, whom she flings so boastfully at my head? Did you see the temper of the woman? What an example she must set in her parish! She has got hold of the wrong end of some gossiping story. As to this young man, you told me his name was 'Weyland'——"

"I told you I was not certain, mamma."

"And that blundering boy called him 'Rylands.' Both are possible names. Now, Mrs. Hammersley mixing up the Priory people, dubs him 'Leyland.' He have money?—impossible! He have expectations?—nothing of the kind! Old Glossop's drudge a prince in disguise?—never! The idea is absurd!"

Something seemed to strike Edith, and she made a dash at Burke's peerage, which

lay crimsoning on the drawing-room table. The volume opened of itself at "Crowbury," but it was the Leyland baronetcy that Edith sought to refer to. "Was there ever anything so perverse?" she observed, ruefully retaining her finger between the pages. "I see it all now. We have made a most ludicrous mistake; to what extent, I am almost afraid to tell you. You will be so dreadfully vexed."

"I am on thorns, Edith; speak out at once."

"Why, this Mr. Richard Leyland, as I see here, is Sir Sidney's nephew, and is now Sir Sidney's heir."

"What have I done?" cried the widow, wildly. "O my poor deserted child! what have I done?"

To Mrs. Atherton's excitement must be ascribed this rather inappropriate epithet.

"The new heir is just arrived," Edith pursued; "some one told us, don't you remember? that he had come. And don't you see, that this Mr. Leyland is staying at Redburn Priory, and not at Redburn village. And

don't you see, he was shooting with his uncle's gamekeepers, and not associating with them!"

"O my poor Edith! it must be so. I could tear my hair with vexation."

"Cheer up, mamma," said her daughter, forcing a smile. "We have hitherto passed in Blankshire for rather a worldly couple. No one can call us worldly now."

"I had him shown out by the page-boy," soliloquized the elder lady. "I was infatuated, blinded, irritable. My unfortunate child, I humbly beg your pardon."

"My first and last admirer," pursued Edith, with serio-comic plaintiveness, "suspected of designs upon the plate, drummed out with ignominy, snubbed, cold-shouldered, cold-watered, cold-blanketed by my misguided mother! It is very pathetic. I shall not get another suitor—at least with his expectations."

"Why did he not mention his relations?" demanded the widow, savagely. "I always make it a point to bring in Lord Crowbury before strangers," which was indeed the fact.

"It is a kind of duty which one owes to society," urged Mrs. Atherton, "to carry such credentials to its esteem, so to speak, upon one's sleeve. How else are people to know how to rate you?"

"How else, indeed?" agreed Edith, dreamily.

"As for this Mr. Leyland," reasoned the mother, growing hot again. "He seems hardly equal to his position. Such namby-pamby diffidence! I have no patience with such ways. Just see the confusion they have caused. If his uncle had kept a ham and beef shop, he could not have spoken more humbly."

"You frightened him to death, mamma," said Edith.

"It was all that abominable Thomas, who must needs say 'Rylands!'" bewailed Mrs. Atherton, wreaking her wrath on the first available scapegoat. "I will unfrock that boy, and send him back to field-work to-morrow. He is not fit to usher up gentlemen. He is unworthy of his buttons. Let him return to the crows!"

"That will not bring Mr. Leyland back," said Edith, with a spice of malice. "But it does not signify; remember, I have sworn by all the gods of young ladydom never to speak to him again."

"A fiddlestick!" cried her mother. "You promised not to speak to Mr. Weyland, Glossop's hack. I allow you to speak to Mr. Leyland, a baronet's nephew, which is quite another pair of shoes."

"'He is gone, he is gone, and we cast away moan!'" quoted the daughter, sarcastically, half enjoying her parent's woebegone perplexity.

"What can we do to bring him back again?"

"Do nothing, mamma," advised Edith. "I dare say the matter will right itself."

It remains to be seen whether Miss Ather-ton was right in her prediction.

END OF VOL. I



